

**A SCHOOL COUNCIL'S INFLUENCE ON COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT
IN A SASKATCHEWAN COMMUNITY**

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By

Jane Pauline Preston

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore the role a school council played in encouraging community involvement in a K to 12 school located within a bedroom community. This qualitative case study included data collected from 35 semi-structured individual interviews conducted with Sunshine's School Community Council (SCC) members, teachers, and community members. Augmented data collection incorporated my attendance at three SCC meetings, 11 community and school visits, and the maintenance of a personal journal during the interview process. Data results were analyzed through Putnam's concept of social capital theory.

During the time of this study, the impact that Sunshine's SCC had on community involvement in school was evolving. The SCC was new to the school community; Sunshine's SCC members displayed nascent levels of trust between themselves and with community members. The SCC predominantly focused its attention on fulfilling the provincially-mandated requirement of contributing to the school's *Learning Improvement Plan*. Since supporting the school's centralized goals consumed much of the SCC's time and attention, the association was less able to promote traditional forms of community involvement in school.

Most participants perceived traditional forms of community involvement in school to positively impact the social cohesion of the school community. Parents believed there were multiple benefits associated with traditional forms of community involvement in school, including improved parent-to-parent relationships, improved school-home relationships, additional support for school curricula, and improved student performance in school. Based on social capital theory, socialization during community

events generates social capital between community members, which encourages further community involvement in school. The forging of bonding, bridging, and linking social capital, through a variety of traditional means, was a fundamental component needed to create, complement, and sustain community involvement in the school.

The majority of SCC participants perceived that the formal components of SCC policy were misaligned with their desire to promote traditional forms of community involvement. Most participants believed that bureaucratic aspects of the SCC policy (and similar organizations) negatively affect productivity. Social capital theory supported the idea that bureaucracy deters the establishment and utilization of trust and social capital.

Sunshine was a bedroom community and the socialization tendencies of the community appeared to negatively influence community involvement. Convenient access to urban amenities, the influx of new community members, and a generational shift of values and lifestyles appeared to deter the creation and utilization of personal and professional stocks of social capital within the community. In contrast, the impact of child-focused events and sporting activities appeared to unite community members and positively influence the creation and utilization of social capital within the community.

Implications arising from this study pinpoint the importance of fostering trusting relationships not only between SCCs members but between SCCs and their communities. In order to generate higher levels of trust, and thereby strengthen the potency of social capital, Sunshine's SCC members need decentralized authority to self-create local goals. The procedure of annual SCC elections also needs reviewing as an annual influx of new members to the SCC negates the sustainability of high levels of trust. On a practical

level, Sunshine's SCC, the school administration, and the school division need to promote SCC communication with the school community.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In May of 2006 the Saskatchewan Government legislated the creation of School Community Councils (SCCs) (Government of Saskatchewan, 2006). The inception of SCCs marked the beginning of a new era for Saskatchewan education because the SCC policy challenges parents, educators, and community members to become more accountable for the achievement of students and to promote greater community involvement in schools. This new trend calls for parents and community members to assume quasi-professional roles in education. That is, alongside educators, parents and community members are collectively involved in the co-creation and attainment of academic goals for students. Accordingly, an intention of the policy is to meld schools and their communities into a more cohesive, symbiotic unit, accountable to improving the educational experiences and outcomes of students.

Even though the SCC policy has been ratified by government, the effect the policy has upon the school community generates myriad questions. Can a mandated policy actually create better school-community relations? What changes to student programs might emanate from increased community involvement? In what ways will the policy's community focus benefit schools, teachers, students, and communities at large? What challenges accompany the policy? What effect do school-community relationships have on achieving the SCC policy intent? My research addresses aspects of all of these background questions; however the specific purpose and research questions generated for my study are presented below.

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of my research was to explore the role a school council played in encouraging community involvement in a K to 12 school located within a Saskatchewan bedroom community. The exploration of this question was based on the perceptions of school council members, teachers, and community members.

The following research questions directed the study:

1. In what perceived ways does the School Community Council influence community involvement with the school community?
2. In what perceived ways does community involvement benefit and challenge the school community?
3. How do social relationships influence the amount and type of community involvement that is reflected within the school community?

Emergence of the Question

According to Denzin and Lincoln (2005), qualitative research is a “situated activity that locates the observer in the world” (p. 3). Within any research, it is important that the researcher describes her background at the onset of the study because this background affects what data are collected and how data are reported and conceptualized (McMillan & Wergin, 2002). Although I do not intend to make my current community, my past experiences, or my acknowledged values the focus of this study, it is important for me, as a researcher, to identify and situate myself in the world of my research. Such self-introspection is a critical part in understanding one’s psychological and emotional state before, during, and after the research experience (Lincoln, 1995). This heightened state of self-awareness or, as referred to by Lincoln, “critical subjectivity” (p. 283), is a vital process because such a personal inventory assists both the audience and the

researcher in recognizing how the researcher's biases, past experiences, and past/present identities may influence the data. Also through this self-auditing action, I am reminded of the rich background knowledge I bring to my research, which increases my enthusiasm for this study. What follows is a description of personal experiences, beliefs, and values.

A Mother, a SCC Member, and a Professional

I believe in the potential of SCCs; through personal reflection, this point is highlighted in many ways. Because I have a young son attending school, four years ago I put my name forward in the hopes of being elected as a SCC member for his school. My SCC candidacy was successful, and, from 2006 to 2008, I served as the SCC secretary for my son's school. In addition to my personal interest pertaining to my son, professionally I am interested in the idea of school councils. I have been a teacher for many years, and issues regarding education appeal to me. Furthermore, on a professional level, three years ago I assisted my doctoral advisor with pilot research pertaining to SCCs. Our study was entitled *School Community Councils: From Policy Meaning to Practice*. Hence, my personal and professional background drew me toward research pertaining to SCCs.

It is more than my general intrigue with the policy and education, however, that entices me to conduct research on SCCs. I value community. I believe that in order to keep a community prosperous and vibrant, interactive relationships within that community are essential. Therefore, I am especially interested in the community component of the SCC policy and how relationships affect a sense of community. In order to further explain my commitment toward the idea of community, I draw upon a series of childhood memories.

Growing Up in My Community

“Farm girl” and “Saskatchewan grasshopper.” These are terms to which I take no offence because these appellations are a realistic and connotative portrayal of who I was, who I am, and who I always hope to be. Nostalgically, I relive exciting childhood memories of driving into town on Friday mornings to deliver five-gallon, silver cream cans to a Sask Dairy transportation truck. At that time, community meant socializing, distributing and buying supplies, and obtaining a free *Dad’s* cookie from the owner of the local grocery store. At that time, community meant being with the local people and being knowledgeable about the culture of the community. Alongside my family, I experienced numerous summer evenings driving the dirt roads, studying crops, and visiting neighbors. Community was attached to a geographical region and secured within a selection of friends who predominantly represented a similar socioeconomic status and parallel views on life.

The notion of community was also linked to the wellness of the family and its extended members. Being the youngest of seven children, it was taken for granted that I would play my part in supporting the viability of my family. Even before my teenage years, I was actively involved with milking cows, feeding livestock, and, depending upon the season, collecting eggs, working in the vegetable garden, and manually picking stones from the fields. Into my teenage years, I drove grain truck and assisted my mother in the preparation of hundreds of quart jars of fruit and vegetable preserves secured in the cellar for our family’s winter consumption. As a youth, I constantly interacted with a variety of family members including siblings, nieces/nephews, aunts/uncles, and neighboring cousins. Surrounded by these people, my childhood community provided me with an

identity and a sense of self-worth, both of which, I believe, are crucial for success during adulthood. My family upbringing metaphorically symbolized characteristics needed to make a rural community strong. The social activity, economic vitality, and overall wellness of our community were wholly dependent upon the physical, emotional, and spiritual support and wellbeing of its individual members.

An additional fundamental aspect relating to the welfare of my community was represented through the local school. Not only did the school add a definitive character to our community, it was a channel of community spirit. The school sponsored local gatherings (Christmas concerts, musical festivals, drama nights), were a convergence point for recreational events (volleyball tournaments, dance lessons), and housed guest speakers supportive of both school and community betterment. The school was utilized for more than academic services; it was the focal point for the social welfare of the community. Because the school's student body personified the hopes and dreams of parents and community members, the school itself reflected the ambition, potential, and synergy of our community. Undeniably, the school played a key role in developing and nourishing a sense of local pride.

An Adult Community Member

At present, I live in a community not affiliated with the geographical location of my childhood. When comparing my past community with that of my present one, the members within my current community appear to dedicate even more time and attention to the education of their children. For example, school events pack the gymnasium such that encore presentations are the norm, parent-teacher interviews have an extremely high attendance rate, and parent volunteerism for classroom events is virtually a non-issue.

Interestingly though, due to lack of interest, when it came to forming the new SCC, members were elected through acclamation. Equally interesting, community activities that extend beyond the direct welfare and physical boundaries of the school are poorly supported. For instance, my current community has a population of over 2,500; however, during a typical Community Association meeting, generally five or fewer people attend the event. Even family-orientated activities are not well-attended, as exemplified by the Community Fall Supper. During the 2007 Community Fall Supper, an abundance of free youth-centered activities and entertainment were advertised and supplied; nonetheless, the event only attracted circa 200 people or 8% of our community's total population.

With the exception of school-focused events, why is it that the members in my community appear to show little interest in socializing, volunteering, or building and maintaining communal relationships with each other? It may possibly be due to the location of the community. I live in a bedroom community, and the vast majority of the area's population commutes to a nearby city for employment. Perhaps because I live so close to an urban area, it is simply unfair to compare my present existence with that of my rural memories. Living in proximity to an urban center causes people from my community to frequent the city not only for employment but for additional reasons, including recreation and entertainment opportunities. Is it the possible allure of the city that captures the attention of our community members and, in effect, consumes our local community spirit? Are the busy lifestyles of people a central reason why many of my community members appear to have limited social interactions with one another? Is the trend for smaller family units connected with the apparent loss of community spirit? The economic status of the families within my community predominantly represents financial

security, and, in general, the community members are well-educated. Could the lack of community spirit be associated with the wealth and/or the level of education reflected by these community members?

In whole or in part, these descriptions of my community may be the undergirding reasons why I often view my community as devoid of widespread community spirit. I wonder whether the disillusionment I have with my own community's lack of communal focus is something that is mirrored in other communities within the province. Then again, maybe community spirit is actually still alive within my community, but reflected within non-traditional, non-quantifiable ways that I do not recognize.

Some scholars argue that Western society these days emulate neoliberal tendencies: our focus on competitiveness, privatization, and a market approach to business fuels academic success, advancement in the workplace, and corporate sustainability (Saad-Filho & Johnston, 2005; Yates, 2004). Could neoliberal tendencies be overshadowing modern communitarian propensities? Has our society changed so much that limited value is now placed on people bonding professionally and socially? Is such *advancement* at the expense of community spirit?

Opposed to a liberalistic premise is the belief that, both naturally and through necessity, human beings are socially-reliant creatures. For instance, the vast majority of society's citizenry, whether local, national, or global, are still dependent upon each other for survival. Recent research demonstrated that human beings are neurologically "hardwired to [socially] connect" with each other and, as the study reported, relationships are fundamental to biological, psychological, social, and spiritual development (Commission for Children at Risk, 2003, p. i). Many authors believe that the wellbeing

of our society is dependent upon strong social bonds and communal interaction (Putnam, 1993, 2000; Veenstra, 2001; Woolcock, 2001). This statement is an underlying force driving me to conduct this research.

Analytical Framework

The influence SCCs exert on community involvement in schools can be studied from a number of theoretical perspectives. However, because the efficacy of school councils is closely aligned with positive interpersonal relationships (Epstein, 2001; Kerr, 2003, 2005; Melvin, 2006), I employed social capital theory as the analytical lens for the research. Furthermore, because community itself encompasses a type of social bond between people (Bauman, 2004; Portes & Sensenbrenner, 2001, Putnam, 2000), I chose to examine SCCs and community involvement in schools through social capital theory (Putnam, 1993, 1995a, 1995b, 2000, 2007).

Bruhn (2005) believed social capital, as collected through family networks, friendship ties, and connections with influential people or organizations, has many beneficial characteristics. Social capital supports the wellbeing of individuals (Putnam, 1993, 2000; Veenstra, 2001; Woolcock, 2001), promotes opportunities to increase human capital (Bourdieu, 1984, 2001, 2002), and facilitates entrepreneurial success (Fukuyama, 1996, 1999). Franke (2005) viewed social capital as a resource that can be utilized by groups or individuals to achieve communal objectives. As applied to my research, utilizing the social and professional links found between the members of a community can lead to a more organized approach to community engagement within the school.

Explanation of Key Words and Terms

My interpretation of certain words and terms that are used within the context of this research need to be explained. These words and phrases include: *community*, *community involvement in schools*, and *bedroom community*.

Community

As revealed in the above self-reflection, the word *community* invokes multiple connotations. The term community is often attached to ideas of wholesomeness, connectedness, and camaraderie. Because a community often exudes a sense of belonging, most people would agree that community is a positive concept. As stated by Sessions and Lightburn (2006), “Belonging to a group ... contributes to a social identity and provides opportunities for a meaningful, contributing social role” (p. 4). A call for community often emerges during a crisis situation, because community conjures a sense of togetherness, strength, focus, and hope. A strong community can be referred to as a family-like network of people, providing security for its members, a sanctuary of kinship, and solidarity of values.

Examined in another light, however, connotations of community can be less positive. There is a price to pay for the insular privileges and group-based securities of assimilated community members. Bauman (2004) described that price as a possible loss of individual freedom, self-autonomy, and self-assertion. Although Furman (1998) agreed that communities are strengthened through the promotion of shared behaviors and norms, Furman also recognized that such unity perversely deters people from securing values that are different from *the group's*. In such a fashion, not only do tight-knit communities tend to restrict the personal freedom and autonomy of individual members,

like-minded community members tend to reject and block the novel views of outsiders. Such insular actions can be very hurtful, personally, socially, and professionally to people who do not conform to the tacit and evident views of a community.

Veeman, Ward, and Walker's (2006) description of community further extends the possible meaning of community:

There are political communities, geographical communities, cultural communities, and historic communities. Communities may be inclusive or exclusive, highly stratified or egalitarian, homogeneous or heterogeneous. There are also communities of privilege and communities of poverty—communities of the elite and communities of the disadvantaged. (p. 75)

When referring to community, scholars often allude to people who are connected by some type of social bond (e.g., Bauman, 2004; Putnam, 2000; Portes & Sensenbrenner, 2001). In this simple sense, community can refer to any populace or group that shares a common interest.

Personalizing such a broad description, I can identify a number of communities to which I have belonged or presently belong. I am an active member of a neighborhood community association. My provision of education tax to a school division and my son's attendance at school makes me a part of a school community. At the university, I connect with an academic community. During a time in my life, I was active within the country dance community. When my son was young, I frequented a mother-and-tot community group. During my years as a masters and PhD student, I participated in a number of graduate student communities. In light of such examples, a possible definition for community may simply be a type of social network.

Another possible definition of community reflects quantifiable characteristics. As identified by Statistics Canada, a community is a geographic location with boundaries on a map (du Plessis, Beshiri, Bollman, & Clemenson, 2001). In support of this point,

several authors who write on the topic of community recognize community as a geographical locality (e.g., Capper, Hafner, & Keyes, 2002; Stukas & Dunlap, 2002).

Bryk, Lee, and Holland (1993) summed up the above discussion when they emphasized that a community is predominantly defined by the presence of both physical and psychological “boundaries” (p. 128). In alliance with these authors, my definition of community melds the two core ideas of social bonding and geographic location. For my research, community constitutes a group of people living in a particular place or region, whereby the people within that area are linked by unifying traits and values, as recognized through such things as ethnicity, culture, religion, and/or lifestyles.

Community Involvement in School

In contrast to the above explanation, the definition of community involvement in school is much simpler. Community involvement in a school refers to any type of connection between a school and community members, organizations, and/or businesses (e.g., educators, parents, school councils, businesses, social services, etc.) that directly or indirectly support students’ physical, social, emotional, and intellectual needs. Specific examples of such community involvement include, but are not limited to, field trips, workshops, community volunteers, adult classes, attendance at school-sponsored events, faith-based activities, scholarships, donations, and charitable events. Such forms of involvement recognize that a school is a part of a larger community and that learning happens both in and beyond the school building. Community involvement assumes that school personnel and members within the school community are co-responsible for the education and welfare of youth (Alberta Education, 2005).

Bedroom Community

When I initially organized my research, instead of referring to *bedroom community*, I had planned on utilizing the term *suburban community*. But, upon contemplation, I recognized that within Saskatchewan, the words *suburban* or *the suburbs* were not commonly used when describing communities that were proximal to cities. In contrast, I had heard academics refer to a bedroom community located on the Canadian Prairie as a *rurban community* (D. Wallin, personal communication, December 2, 2009). However, through further research and personal discussions on the topic, the most widely used, localized term of a Saskatchewan suburban community appeared to be bedroom community.

In my search to define bedroom community, I contacted Statistics Canada, asking if they formally acknowledged the term. Unlike *rural* and *urban*, Statistics Canada did not have a formal definition for bedroom community (T. Melanson [Statistics Canada], personal communication, November 28, 2007). Continuing on my quest to formally define bedroom community, I searched various books and journals; however, within these documents I could not find references for the term bedroom community.

I narrowed my search to American and Canadian newspapers, and, by doing so, I realized that the usage of the term appeared to be a Canadian practice. That is, I discovered that a variety of Canadian newspaper articles were about bedroom communities. Even though these journalists did not include a formal definition of bedroom community within their articles (e.g., Bernhardt, 2007; Hope, 2002; McCormick, 2000; McNairn 2002; Sankey, 2010; Switzer, 2010; Toneguzzi, 2006), they often provided descriptive examples. Hope (2002) indicated that a bedroom community

in Alberta is Okotoks, where 70% of its workforce commutes to Calgary. McNairn (2002) stated that 12 bedroom communities exist in Saskatchewan. Switzer (2010) talked about the Saskatchewan Rural Municipality (RM) of Edenwood and indicated that this RM “surrounds the bedroom communities of White City, Balgonie, and Pilot Butte ... to the east of Regina” (p. 33).

Some e-journalists also explained that people/companies such as real estate agents, land development companies, and small town administrators use the term bedroom community for professional reasons. Karen Gonzales, a real estate agent from Alberta, stated that when living in a bedroom community, “You can be in the city within a matter of minutes, but it’s still technically country-living (Toneguzzi, 2006, p. D1).” A representative from Tristar Communities (a Canadian land development corporation) depicted bedroom communities to have a type of small-town environment that people return to having worked all day in the city (Hope, 2002). When the Mayor of Strathmore, Alberta talked about bedroom communities, he stated, “We don’t want people travelling back and forth to work to the city ... we want them to be part of the community ... The prime motivator [to live in a bedroom community] should be the quality of life” (McCormick, 2000, p. H1).

In my continued effort to formally define bedroom community, I referenced a number of academic dictionaries, including *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English*, *The Canadian Oxford Dictionary*, and *Webster’s Third New International Dictionary Unabridged*, all of which did not have an entry for bedroom community. I took my search online and checked the *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary*, *The Cambridge Online Dictionary of American English*, and *Dictionary.com*. The latter

dictionary did have an entry for the term bedroom community, recognizing it as: “a suburban area or town where many commuters live, quite a distance from the place of employment; also called bedroom suburb, [UK dormitory town]” (Dictionary.com, 2006, ¶ 1). Toward the end of my endeavor to formally define bedroom community, I broadened my search to include less academic sources. I entered the Wikipedia’s website and found an interesting international perspective about commuter towns:

A commuter town may also be known as a **bedroom community** [Canada and U.S. usage], a **dormitory town** [UK Commonwealth and Ireland usage] or less commonly a **dormitory village** [UK Commonwealth and Ireland]. These terms suggest that residents sleep in these neighborhoods, but mostly work elsewhere. (Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia, 2008, ¶ 2)

Aggregating the above information, I created my own definition for bedroom communities. Within my research, bedroom communities are geographical neighborhoods where a large portion of its population commutes to an urban center for employment reasons. Using these standards, any community that has a large portion of its populace commuting to one of Saskatchewan’s eight urban centers is recognized as a bedroom community. A bedroom community is the research site of my study.

Community and School: History and Legislation of SCCs

The purpose of my research was to explore the role a school council played in encouraging community involvement in a bedroom community. The following information historically positions the topics of my research (community involvement and SCCs) and leads into the legislative background of SCCs.

International and Canadian Foci

The formal roots for establishing community involvement in education extend back to John Dewey’s prolific works, which were prominent around the turn of the 20th century (e.g., 1899, 1902, 1916, & 1938). As an American scholar and philosopher,

Dewey fervently advocated that every community needs to take responsibility for educating its youth, and the community's interests, talents, and skills need to be an integral component of the school's culture and curriculum. He advocated that school and practical experiences stemming from the community should be meaningfully connected. He believed such school-community collaboration endorses individual growth and promotes civic responsibilities of students and community members.

Throughout Canada and the United States, the idea of community involvement in education lost popularity during the mid 1900s. During that time, educational systems began to focus on national economic interests rather than community needs. According to Tyack (1974), this change of focus was the consequence of demographic and social issues including an influx of rural people to urban cities, the redefining of societal requirements because of issues ensuing from World Wars I and II, and a stronger national commitment to increased productivity. During the mid 1960s, community activists and parents throughout the United States began to lobby for increased community control over the education of their youth; however, little resulted from their demonstrations (Sanders, 2003).

Since the mid-1990s, community had again emerged as a trendy topic within educational forums, and the topic continues to attract the attention of researchers and policymakers (Furman, 2002). Popularized by Sergiovanni's (1994) writings regarding the benefits of promoting *school community*, there is now a widespread assumption within educational literature that increasing a sense of community within schools holds promise for school and societal improvement (Apple & Beane, 1995; Calderwood, 2000; Tymchak, 2001a). At practical and local levels, issues surrounding the roles and

responsibilities of the community within the educational sector are the foci of federal, provincial, and local policies, professional discourses, and casual conversations (Sanders, 2003). As a result, community involvement in Saskatchewan has taken on renewed significance, as exemplified by the design and implementation of the SCC policy.

Saskatchewan's Focus

In what follows, I present the history of community involvement in Saskatchewan. Prior to the 1900s, the lifestyle of people who resided in the area now known as Saskatchewan underscored the importance of community. Interestingly, community-focused tendencies have recently been highlighted through the 2006 SCC legislation.

A Saskatchewan History. The genesis of Saskatchewan peoples' communal outlook to life (Eisler, 2006), originated well over a hundred years ago, when thousands of immigrant settlers arrived in this province. During the Great Depression, Dirty Thirties, World Wars, and throughout the merciless winters and unremittingly hot summers, in an act of survival, people relied on each other and their community.

The importance that Saskatchewan people placed on community was also evident within educational governance. To educate its youth, the province was geographically divided into school districts that were no more than five miles in length and width (Langlois & Scharf, 1991). Each district had a school at its center, and a Local School Board consisting of community members governed each school. A number of Educational Acts then followed promoting the consolidation of school divisions (e.g., *The School Act* [1912], *The School Divisions Act* [1940], and *The Larger School Units Act* [1944]). Specifically through *The Larger School Units Act* of 1944, the hundreds of

school divisions that existed throughout Saskatchewan were amalgamated into about 80. Throughout the years, via additional amalgamations, school districts increased in geographical size; however, the main responsibilities of the Local School Board remained relatively unchanged and included: (a) hiring and supervising of all personnel employed within the school division; (b) creating policies and programs that meet the needs of the staff, parents, students, and school community; (c) making budgetary decisions for all schools within the division; and (d) determining the amount of educational tax to collect from community members (determining the mill rate)¹

For the most part, 80-plus school divisions continued to be in place throughout Saskatchewan until 2006, at which time school districts were condensed by amalgamation from 82 to 26 (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2008b). Because the school divisions were now decidedly larger, it became increasingly difficult for a Local School Board of five or six people, for example, to promote local representation and voice for a school division encompassing 40-plus schools. Thus, an unfavorable factor associated with the school division amalgamations was the perceived loss of voice for individual schools.

SCC Legislation. Prior to the imminent school amalgamations of 2006, the Government of Saskatchewan appointed a panel to write a policy paper to explore how local parental and community influence could continue to be a central focus within bigger school divisions. The report, entitled *Local Accountability and Partnership Panel: Final Report*, recommended a framework for the maintenance of local accountability and community involvement for K to 12 education. The government officially responded to

¹ In March 2009, Saskatchewan's Ministry of Education took away the Local School Board's responsibility to set their own mill rate (tax collection rate) and, thereby, made a sweeping change to how public education is currently funded throughout the province (French, 2009).

the report, in May 2006, by legislating SCCs through amendments to *The Education Act, 1995*.

Section 140.1 of *The Education Act, 1995* ensured that “every board of education shall establish a school community council for each school in its division” (p. 84).

Section 140.5 stipulated the powers and duties of SCCs. Every SCC shall: (a) facilitate parent and community participation in school planning, (b) provide advice to its board of education, (c) provide advice to its school’s staff, (d) provide advice to other agencies involved in the learning and development of pupils, and (e) comply with the regulations and policies of its board of education (p. 85). In light of this legislation, all other types of parent councils were to be replaced by SCCs (Endsin & Melvin, n.d.).

In the period prior to the existence of SCCs, a community presence in schools was presented by a number of parent organizations such as Home and School Associations, Parent Teachers Associations, and Community School Councils (Endsin & Melvin, n.d). These volunteer groups primarily focused attention on fundraising and volunteer activities for the school community. Currently, in addition to the presence of SCCs, within some school divisions, there still exist some forms of Home and School Associations

Saskatchewan Learning (2005) identified the purpose of SCCs to be twofold. The first purpose is to “develop shared responsibility for the learning success and well-being of all children and youth” (p. 8). The second purpose is to “encourage and facilitate parent and community engagement in school planning and improvement processes” (p. 8). With regard to the second purpose, SCCs are a medium for advocating greater community involvement in schools. This statement is the epicenter of my research, as

through my study, I explore the role SCCs play in encouraging community involvement in schools.

Relating the SCC Policy to the Learning Improvement Plan and the Continuous Improvement Framework. Closely associated with the SCC policy is the *Learning Improvement Plan* and the *Continuous Improvement Framework*; hence, an explanation of the backgrounds of these strategies and how they relate to the SCC policy is relevant for my study. The *Continuous Improvement Framework* (a policy implemented by Saskatchewan Education in 2006) is a centralized planning mechanism, which attempts to align three educational governing bodies: (a) Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, (b) Boards of Education, and (c) local school governance via the forum of SCCs (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2008a). These bodies are to work in unison to advance provincial and local Pre-K to grade12 educational outcomes (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2008a). As mandated by the *Continuous Improvement Framework* policy, provincial educational priorities must be reflected within the school division's goals. In turn, the school division's goals must be reflected within a school's goals, which are intended to address the local academic and social needs of students through a document called the *Learning Improvement Plan*. Both the *Continuous Improvement Framework* policy and the SCC policy mandate that SCC members must assist in the creation of the *Learning Improvement Plan*.

Significance of Study

Mandated by 2006 provincial policy, SCCs have been introduced as an integral component of Saskatchewan school governance (Saskatchewan Executive Council, 2006). My study particularly focused on the aspect of the SCC policy that advocates that

a community, mediated through a school council, is to be more directly involved with its school. Few studies have specifically documented whether and/or how a school council affects community involvement in a school. Also overlooked within the literature are the implications for community involvement in schools. Namely, how does community involvement benefit and challenge the school? As a final point, because of the newness of the SCC policy, little research has been conducted on SCCs. Hence, this study is noteworthy.

Previous studies have documented the opinions and beliefs of school council members in relation to various educational issues (Boylan, 2005; Boylan & Bittar, 2001; Collins, 2000); however, other than one paper (Corter, Harris, & Pelletier, 1998), the school council research I read neglected to include perceptions from community members who are not on school councils. As reflected within my study, nine of the 17 participant community members were not on the SCC. As well, with regard to community members, within the school council research I perused, I found no indication that a voice was given to community members who did not have children enrolled in school. Six of the 17 community members interviewed for this research did not have children attending the school. What are the views of these community members with regard to the role school councils play in encouraging community involvement in the school? My study cast a light, not previously illuminated, upon the perceptions of community members pertaining to school councils and community involvement in school.

Another significant aspect of my study centered on site location and context. In my study, I focused on community involvement in a school located in a bedroom

community. There is a lack of educational research that focuses on bedroom communities. While reviewing the literature pertaining to this research topic, I found only one American study that was conducted in a bedroom community (see Poulsen & Tinggaard Svendsen, 2005). When taking into account the fact that the population of bedroom communities within Saskatchewan is increasing (Bernhardt, 2007; McNairn, 2002), conducting research on this province's bedroom communities is increasingly important. What specific school council and community involvement issues arise that can be directly attributed to bedroom community status? Will the influx of new people into communities have an effect on the school council's ability to encourage community involvement in schools? Answers to such questions add to the significance of my research, because other research has not taken into account these questions.

Assumptions

To carry out my research, I employed a qualitative methodology utilizing a case study research design (Stake, 2005). Underpinning this type of research is a constructivist epistemology (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005), which highlights that knowledge is socially constructed and changeable depending on circumstances. Furthermore, a relativist ontology, whereby multiple constructions of realities exist (Guba & Lincoln, 2005), is assumed for this study. These philosophical explanations are characteristics of the constructivist paradigm, which dictates that both meaning and reality are co-constructed by the melding of participant perceptions and experiences and by the researcher interpretations of these perceptions and experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). This type of research structure provides a holistic description of real-life events and a rich understanding of an experiential phenomenon (Yin, 2003).

In addition to assumptions inherent within the qualitative research I have chosen to employ, the SCC policy itself reflects assumptive principles. The very creation of the SCC policy supports the belief that community involvement in schools is an important factor of student success, both academically and socially. Another assumption with regard to this policy is that SCCs are an appropriate and effective medium for the promotion of community involvement in schools.

Delimitations

According to Rudestam and Newton (2001), delimitations are self-imposed limitations applied to the research design. To keep the research manageable, there were several delimitations applied to my study. First, data collection was confined to one school within a Saskatchewan bedroom community. Second, in order to gain insight surrounding the purpose of my study, qualitative data reflecting participant perspectives were delimited to SCC members, teachers, and community members. Furthermore, the data were delimited to participant perceptions during a seven-month data collection timeframe. As a final point, the study was delimited to data collection and analysis conducted within the constructivist paradigm utilizing a qualitative case study design.

Limitations

According to Rudestam and Newton (2001), limitations are “restrictions in the study over which you have no control” (p. 90). The following limitations apply to my research. Although the data were collected via several methods (semi-structured interviews, site observations, and a reflective journal), all data were mediated through me, rather than, for example, through an inanimate inventory or questionnaire (Merriam, 1998). Because I was the primary and sole research instrument for data collection and

analysis, the data were influenced, to some extent, by me. However, incorporated into this limitation was the advantage that, as opposed to the other more objective data collection instruments, I was able to be more responsive to context. For example, during interviews I was able to immediately process certain components of data, I was sensitive to nonverbal aspects of communication, and I was able to ask for clarification and summarization of information (Guba & Lincoln, 1981). All of these attributes complement qualitative case study research, which is committed to capturing in-depth understanding of the subject matter at hand (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

A further limiting aspect of my study involved generalization. The nature of a case study design denotes a small sample size, and, because of the limited sample size, generalization of results cannot be bestowed beyond the case study (Stake, 2005). However, within chapter 4, the context and peripheries of the research were described in detail to assist readers in judging the usefulness and transferability of the study's results to similar contexts.

Another limitation deals with timing. Because of the newness of the policy, all SCCs within Saskatchewan have been implemented within the past four years; however, I collected my data during the second year of SCC implementation. The study is limited to representing the perspectives of participants during the early implementation phase of SCCs within Saskatchewan schools.

Although I believe social capital theory is a powerful analytic tool that is aligned with the purview of my research (the SCC and community involvement in school), I would be negligent not to mention that there are limitations to the theory. Social capital is an abstract, complex concept, and it is interpreted and defined differently among

scholars. Hence, there is no consensus on what social capital is or how it is measured. Some authors indicate trust is social capital (Fukuyama, 1996, 1997; Poulsen & Tingaard Svendsen, 2005). Putnam (1993) recognized trust as a source of social capital. Coleman (1988) labeled trust as a form of social capital, and Lin (1999) described social capital as a collection of assets resulting from relationships. Social capital conversations also include a debate over whether it should be identified through individual people or through collective community descriptors (Braum & Ziersch, 2003). Furthermore, much of the social capital research is quantitative in nature (e.g., Halpern, 2005; Poulsen & Tingaard Svendsen, 2005; Putnam, 1993, 2000; 2007). Through acknowledging these social capital limitations, in the context of this study, I recognize rich research opportunities. There is a need for studies to use qualitative research to analyze the unique potentials of social capital theory. Qualitative case studies, such as my study, are based on contextualized details and can benefit greatly from the dimensions of social capital theory as an explanatory tool.

Organization of the Dissertation

In this initial chapter, I outlined the purpose and research questions that directed the study. My personal background and beliefs, as they relate to the research, were clarified, and the conceptual framework for the study was identified. Explanations of the key terms—*community*, *community involvement in school*, and *bedroom community*—were provided. I presented a brief history of community involvement in North America and, particularly, in Saskatchewan. This background led to a description of Saskatchewan's SCC policy. The significance of the study was stipulated, and assumptions, delimitations, and limitations related to the research were identified.

Chapter 2 provides a detailed account of information pertaining to community involvement, school councils, and the interaction of school councils and community involvement. Chapter 2 details the efficacy of school councils, highlights how various components of community involvement in schools effect the education that students receive in school, and presents the theoretical grounding of my research. Threaded throughout chapter 2, I establish the need for my study.

Chapter 3 outlines the research methodology, the research design, and data collection methods employed for the research. Also within this chapter, I justify the approaches I took to conduct the study. A description and table outlining participant information is presented. I explain the steps taken to analyze the data. Furthermore, issues dealing with the trustworthiness of data and ethical considerations are described.

Data findings are presented within chapter 4. The data results are segregated into three sections that individually address each of the three research questions. To assist in ensuring the credibility of this research, chapter four contains direct quotes from participants.

Chapter 5 incorporates a theoretical discussion of the study's results. Such analysis employs a multi-layered understanding of the purpose of my study. Within this chapter, I predominantly use Putnam's research on social capital theory to explain my findings.

There are a number of recommendations that arise from this research. These items are presented within chapter 6. Also, in the last chapter, I highlight the significance of the study and my research reflections having completed the study. I provide suggestions for future research. I end my dissertation with a short epilogue.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter is organized into three sections. The first section depicts forms of community involvement in Saskatchewan schools and schools in general. Research pertaining to school councils is highlighted in the second section. In the third section of this chapter, I describe components of social capital and explain how this theoretical framework was applied to my study. Not only does this chapter present the background literature associated with community involvement, school councils, and social capital, it establishes and secures a need for my research.

Community Involvement in School

There is a growing body of philosophical and empirical work dedicated to discerning the *whys* and *hows* of community involvement in schools. Herein, I present information related to forms of school-community collaboration, community involvement in elementary and high school, and some of benefits and challenges of community involvement in schools. The importance of my study is threaded throughout this information.

Forms of School-Community Collaboration

Pushor (2007) acknowledged that the meaning of community involvement is different for every school. For example, community involvement in school could mean “creating opportunities for families to connect with one another, with school staff, and with community groups” (p. 8). In other communities, it could mean inviting businesses

to converse with students and their families about employment opportunities.

Community involvement in schools may also include opening the school for community events, working with families to develop a community-based educational program, or school personnel working with families to help solve community issues. Other community-focused and community-strengthening ideas include getting seniors involved in school activities, setting up welcoming committees for new families in the area, organizing community members to volunteer for bus patrol, organizing daycares within the school, creating adult and youth special interest clubs, and sponsoring a community-wide Career Expo within the school (Saskatchewan School Boards Association, 2007).

Sanders' (2001) work reiterated that school-community collaboration can take on a variety of forms. He explained such partnerships can be student-centered, family-centered, school-centered, community-centered, or a combination of these. Student-centered activities include those pursuits that enhance the learning opportunities available to students and are exemplified in such things as student awards, scholarships, mentoring programs, and career-focused activities such as job shadowing. Family-centered activities focus on the wellbeing of the family and include such things as parent workshops, adult educational classes, family counseling, and family fun nights. School-centered activities benefit the school and include beautification projects, parent/community donations of school resources/equipment, and classroom assistance. Community-centered activities assist the community and its citizens and include such things as charitable events, art and science exhibits, and community revitalization projects.

As defined for my study, community involvement is any type of connection between schools and community members, organizations, and/or businesses (e.g., educators, parents, school councils, businesses, social services, etc.) that directly or indirectly support students' physical, social, emotional, and intellectual needs. My definition of community involvement in school incorporates the many characteristics and forms of community involvement in school, as described in the above literature.

In particular, one form of school-community collaboration is the integration of private businesses into the school. Hopkins and Wendal (1997) stipulated that even though the number of businesses interested in exerting time and money into public education is increasing, the positive effects of school-business partnerships are not guaranteed. For example, Mickelson (1999) conducted a case study comparing two types of school-business partnerships in North Carolina. The first involved a substantial grant to fund Information Technology (IT) resources in four participatory schools. This project resulted in the development of a technologically-rich school, but faced challenges because of uneven student enrollment numbers and disproportionate allocation of finances within the schools. The second partnership involved incorporating private computer technology specialists into 10 schools. This project was significantly compromised because the technology specialists and educators were not appropriately trained to interact with each other. In both these scenarios, teachers, students, parents, and community members were not invited to assist in the planning and development of the partnership, thus, highlighting the importance of including key stakeholders in the development of effective school-business partnerships.

For my study, one of the research questions specifically focused on the benefits and challenges associated with community involvement, and, as exemplified above, the potential influence of businesses in school falls into this domain. Because my research was based within a bedroom community, teachers and community members could easily access city businesses. Thus, the topic of school-business relationships is pertinent background information for my study.

Elementary and High School Contexts of Community Involvement

For the past 30 years, researchers have acknowledged that there is a decisive link between constructive parent involvement (a form of community involvement) in school and the enhanced educational experiences of students, especially for elementary students. Studies have identified that the student benefits of parent involvement include increased academic achievement, better attendance, improved behavior, increased self-esteem, and a stronger motivation to succeed (Darch, Miao, & Shippen, 2004; Epstein, 2001; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Hiatt-Michael, 2001; Levine & Lezotte, 1995). Parent involvement is predominantly exemplified through such things as a parent being involved with a child through the monitoring and assistance of homework, shared reading, tutoring assistance using the school resources, attending parent-teacher interviews, volunteering at school, and attending school-sponsored functions. Such examples highlights that community involvement in elementary school, for the most part, is defined through parental participation in a child's academic experiences. Via my literature search, I discovered that research around elementary schools and community involvement is devoid of information that pertains to community involvement beyond these direct forms of parental participation in their children's education. This study attempts to fill that

research gap by focusing on community involvement through the influence of a school council.

As compared to elementary schools, high schools generally lag behind in their efforts to integrate community involvement into their school culture (Epstein, 2001; Sanders & Lewis, 2005; Simon 2001). Nevertheless, there exists some literature pertaining to community involvement in high schools. Simon's (2001) study included a survey of 1,000 American high school principals; only half of these principals reported to have a community-service program within their school, and most principals reported that their students spent less than two hours a week volunteering at community sites (Simon, 2001). Sanders (1998) found that, in general, high school efforts to improve collaboration between student families and the community were hampered by a pervasive belief among parents, faculty, and principals that partnerships at the secondary level were redundant. Foley's (2001) research focused on investigating school-community programming within 17 high schools. He concluded that school-community partnerships were limited, and, of the school-community programs that did exist, student internships with nearby businesses were the predominant form of community involvement in the high school. One particular challenge associated with community involvement in high school was that high school administrators and educators found it difficult to find the time required to develop community partnership programs (Foley, 2001; Sanders, 1998).

Within a Canadian high school context, one way to promote school-community relations is by directly incorporating community involvement into the curriculum. As stated by the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training (1999), every student who begins secondary school during or after the 1999–2000 school year must complete a

minimum of 40 hours of community activities as part of the requirements for an Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD). The purpose of this requirement is to encourage students to develop experiential awareness of civic responsibility and an understanding of how their contributions support and strengthen their communities (Ontario Ministry of Education and Training, 1999). In such cases, student volunteerism can be viewed as a mechanism used to assist in the maintenance and growth of a community, which, in turn, contributes to the welfare of society. This purview emphasizes the concept that one precept of community involvement in education is to raise socially responsible citizens.

Within Saskatchewan, the curricula followed by teachers in some high schools incorporate aspects of community involvement. For example, some Saskatoon high schools offer Career and Work Education programs (Saskatoon Public Schools, 2005). For these curricular programs, students access the community as a learning environment and thereby enhance their opportunities for career success. In this context, community involvement is linked to the student's career progression or school-business collaborations.

In the above literature, I described dimensions of community involvement specifically within elementary and high school settings. My research assumes a unique place within the literature because my study combined the topics of community involvement and a K to 12 bedroom community school—a combined topic upon which I found no prior research.

Community Involvement through Service-Learning

In addition to promoting community involvement through high school courses specifically devoted to the topic, community involvement is also exemplified through a

concept known as service-learning. Popularized during the past decade, service-learning has been associated with serving the dual interests of the student and a community, whether that community is local, national, or international. Such forms of community involvement enhance the intellectual and social character of the student and contribute to the wellbeing of a community. Thomson (2006) defined service-learning as a curricular approach that facilitates student learning through the engagement of community services specifically addressing the needs of the community. Kaiser-Drobney (2011) added that service-learning can generate a win-win-win effect for students, teachers, and a community. Students win because they discover, through a community service, the relevancy of their coursework. The teachers win because they facilitate effective pedagogical instruction through the student's experiential learning. The community wins because members within a community are positively affected by student acts. In sum, service-learning is a medium for students to learn about their community, engage in active forms of citizenship, and develop personal and social-emotional attributes (Thomson, 2006).

In an effort to further explain features of service-learning, Gent (2009) provided subject-specific examples (see pp. 13–14). As an art project, students develop a logo for a community agency or organization. Biology students build and mount birdhouses in the school community and stock nearby lakes with fish acquired from a provincial gaming commission. In English class, students write letters to local senior citizens in residential care. As part of the social studies curriculum, students campaign to buy mosquito nets for African countries. High school students develop a fitness program for elementary students. Lower elementary students count the pennies raised in a school-

wide UNICEF fundraiser. Other examples of service-learning include students producing a CD of songs documenting the history of the community, growing vegetables and donating the food to a food bank, sponsoring a concert at a long-term care facility, and creating a community recycling site. As outlined in chapter 2, my definition of community involvement incorporates all of these examples of service-learning. As applied to my research, I wonder whether the role of the SCC could facilitate community involvement via service-learning projects.

Research has documented a range of benefits that are accrued by students who participate in service-learning. In an American study, 2,400 high school students were divided into two groups: one group participated in a service-learning project, and the other group did not. Comparing these two groups, the students with the service-learning experience were more likely to report that they put great effort into their work and enjoyed school (Billig, Root, & Jesse, 2007). A direct link has been found between students experiencing service-learning and the attainment of higher test scores (Billig, 2002; Gent, 2007). One study found that grade 5 students who participated in service-learning scored significantly higher in Language Arts and social studies than grade 5 students who did not participate in a similar program (Billig, 2002).

In addition to academic benefits, service-learning has been shown to build the civic and the empathetic character of students. A study comparing 1,153 middle school students, found that those students enrolled in service-learning programs reported greater concern for the welfare of others in their community (Scales, Blyth, Berkas, & Keilsmeier, 2000). Studies show that students engaged in service-learning display empathy (Morgan & Streb, 1999, 2001), accept responsibility for addressing societal

challenges, and display a general concern for the environment and welfare of their community (Melchoir & Bailis, 2002). Otherwise stated, the research highlights that this form of community involvement often produces academic and social benefits for students. An interesting, new dimension to community involvement through service-learning projects is that it can be used to address environmental concerns.

Types of Community-Focused Schools

A growing number of educational leaders are recognizing the need to integrate a greater community presence into school environments. One type of school that serves as an example of how to make a school the center of the community is called a community school. The school governance and physical surroundings of Reggio Emilia and Waldorf schools also exemplify how community involvement can be woven into a school's culture. Although my research was not conducted in these particular school settings, within my study, I questioned the potential benefits of community involvement in school. Some potential benefits are exemplified within a synopsis of these particular schools.

Community Schools. Student wellbeing is a concept that cannot be viewed in isolation from broader societal issues, because a student's home and community environment have a direct impact on his academic and social wellness. Within Saskatchewan, Tymchak (2001b) indicated that the realities of modern-day society reflect changing family dynamics, growing ethnic diversity among students, an increased number of special needs children, and specialized workplace demands due to globalization. Tymchak described the shifting focus within schools when he said, "About 25 percent of children today come to school with problems relating to poverty and family ... dysfunction that interfere with learning" (p. 3). Public education is facing a scenario

where schools are becoming progressively accountable for the learning achievements of an ever-divergent student population. Meanwhile, educational funding across Canada is often being cut or remains stagnant (Cirella, 2010; Laucius, 2009; Ungerleider & Levin, 2007).

Sanders and Lewis (2005) believed one way of addressing the increased needs of students and reduced funding is through a renewed focus on community participation within schools. This notion highlights that the local community has the potential to provide support and strength for schools, especially for those students whose social environments are stressful and fragmented (Dryfoos, 1998; Nettles, 1991). In other words, school personnel overwhelmed by the social, emotional, physical, and spiritual needs of the new generation of youth are now looking towards their local community for assistance and guidance.

In 1980, community schools were introduced into Saskatchewan with the intent of addressing Aboriginal poverty issues. As of 2004, there were 98 community schools operating throughout the province (Wotherspoon, Schissel, & Evitts, 2005). Community schools are considered educational facilities that are open for extended hours (e.g., on weekdays, weekends, and during the summers) in order to provide academic, recreational, health, and social services for community members and to provide work-preparation opportunities for community members (Decker & Boo, as cited in Jordan, 1999). The community school philosophy seeks to build authentic and respectful connections among schools, families, and community members, thereby enhancing the capacity of the entire community. Although no two community schools are alike, a common attribute threaded throughout all community schools is that they provide

students and community members with a diversified assortment of academic programs, nonacademic programs, and other community services located within the school building. In *School^{PLUS}: A Vision for Children and Youth*, Tymchak (2001a) recommended that a “community school philosophy be adopted for all public schools in the province [of Saskatchewan]” (p. 47). The School^{PLUS} initiative suggests that all schools should be centers of the community, ensuring that school facilities are an accessible resource for the local community (Government of Saskatchewan, 2002).

Dryfoos (2000) believed community schools integrate the concept of mind, body, and building in a holistic approach to education. The mind is addressed through academic classes offered to students and adult community members. The body is addressed through onsite primary health services (e.g., immunizations and dentistry) and wellness and career counselors for students and community members. The school building is recognized by community members as a resource to meet the needs of the entire community. The school facilities can be used for such things as preschool and before- and after-school childcare. In addition, the school community can sponsor a breakfast, lunch, and an after-school snack program within the school. The community often utilizes the school auditorium and/or school property, and various community healthcare facilities are located within the school. In such ways, the concept of community involvement is one of mind, body, and building.

The ideas associated with School^{PLUS} and community schools are not limited to the province of Saskatchewan; rather, these ideas are becoming increasingly popular both nationally and internationally. The Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (2002) stipulated that, in an effort to address the complexities of learning, provincial/territorial

ministers must commit to strengthening partnerships with students, educational institutions, businesses, individuals, community organizations, and parents. Dryfoos (1999) noted that an increasing number of American schools are also responding to essential societal demands by developing community school programs such as onsite childcare, tutoring opportunities for students and adults, and community recreational activities.

Fullan (2003) stated that to initiate and sustain successful school reform, educators “need to reach out and become more responsive to parent involvement and community development” (p. 44). Noonan (2004) believed current educational reform movements within Saskatchewan reflect the importance of closer school-community partnerships, and School^{PLUS} is one vehicle being used to ensure school and communities become increasingly connected. The concept of community is purportedly being used to offer a solution to an array of interrelated problems such as overburdened families and also used to enhance the quality of education by offering pertinent community-related curricula.

Reggio Emilia and Waldorf Schools. The governance, curriculum, and educational resources found in Reggio Emilia schools (first established in Italy in the 1940s) and Waldorf schools (first established in Germany in the 1920s) exemplify how a community presence can be part of the school’s culture. The Reggio Emilia tradition, which values community support for its children, is an expansion of an Italian cultural belief that children are the collective responsibility of the state (Follari, 2007). The physical outlay of a Reggio Emilia classroom focuses on concepts of community. Through wall-size windows and doors that lead directly to the outdoors, classroom

ergonomics draw attention to the schoolyard and surrounding community (Tarr, 2001). Projects displayed around the school and classroom activities reinforced through the curriculum reflect themes emanating from the school community. As Follari (2007) pointed out, “The connection between their [the students’] learning environment and life outside the classroom is viewed as an interrelated, interdependent one” (p. 207).

In Reggio Emilia schools, the importance of strong teacher-student and teacher-parent relationships are apparent. It is common for students to stay with the same teacher for several years to create consistency for the student and to build strong relationships between teachers, students, parents, and the community. Parents are expected to partake in regular meetings discussing school policy, child development concerns, and curriculum planning and evaluation. The community’s voice and influence are also formally channeled through the school’s governance system. The school council includes teachers, parents, and community members who have the authority to determine the educational policies of the school (New, 1998). The philosophical practices of Reggio Emilia schools are currently established in a number of Canadian schools, including Mayfair Community Public School (Saskatoon, SK) (Saskatoon Public Schools, 2009/2010) and Grovenor School (Edmonton, AB) (O’Donnell, 2009).

In the aftermath of World War I, Rudolf Steiner devoted his life to exploring the spirituality and cognitive development of human beings (Follari, 2007). His philosophies were epitomized in a school program called Waldorf education, which addressed the body, mind, and spirit of the child. Although Steiner believed that each Waldorf school should maintain curricular commonalities, each school also reflects the particular culture and needs of the local community. For example, much of the classroom décor (e.g.,

pillows, couches, rugs, plants, etc.) originate from materials originating and services rendered from within the local community. The foods served to the students are organic and often grown by students or parents of students. Waldorf schools are currently located in a number of Canadian cities including Vancouver, Calgary, Ottawa, and Toronto (Waldorf Education Canada, n.d.).

In the case of Reggio Emilia and Waldorf schools, the community is a definitive part of the school's physical and spiritual culture. These types of school settings highlight additional components of community involvement in school.

Benefits of Community Involvement in School

In what follows, I describe the numerous advantages of community involvement in school by segregating information into three categories: general benefits, rural community benefits, and urban community benefits. This section is relevant to my study for a number of reasons. First, one of my research questions specifically queried the benefits of community involvement in school. As well, my research was conducted in a bedroom community, which possessed both rural and urban attributes. On the one hand, the bedroom community of my research possessed rural-like characteristics because the community had a rural population in terms of numbers and an agricultural focus (which is common to many Saskatchewan rural communities). On the other hand, because most of the people living in the bedroom community worked in the city, they were knowledgeable about urban cultures and norms. In such a way, the populace of the bedroom community of my research mirrored characteristics of an urban population.

General Benefits. There are direct and indirect benefits of close school-community collaboration. Community involvement in schools has been associated with

increased learning opportunities for students (Durkin 1998; Epstein, 2001), academic gains for language-minority students (Lucas, Henze, & Donato, 1990), a reduction in negative student behaviors (Nettles, 1991), and a more positive parental attitude toward school (Sanders, Epstein, & Connor-Tadros, 1999). Community involvement in schools provides opportunities for students to participate in productive leisure activities (Benson, Leffert, Scales, & Blyth, 1998) such as hockey and soccer. Simon (2001) commented on the positive effect that community involvement has on student attendance when she stated, “In close-knit neighborhoods where teenagers are held accountable to the community’s adults—not just their own parents—parent networks may prevent teenagers from skipping school because they know that other parents may be keeping tabs on them” (p. 13). This quote illustrates how public education can be a communal affair.

Tolbert and Theobald (2006) claimed authentic, hands-on learning is produced when community issues are directly incorporated into classroom themes. Howley and Eckman (1997) provided examples of such experiential learning. Local field trips reinforce various aspects of the curriculum. Outdoor education projects utilize the natural environment of the community, augmenting the science curriculum. School-based activities, such as writing assignments, can develop into independent community businesses, such as the creation of a local newspaper.

An underlying reason for promoting community involvement in education is that community resources can be utilized by the school to generate a productive workforce for the future. Such a rationale reflects a market approach towards education. Sanders (2003) stated, “Proponents argue that school-community partnerships, specifically those that involve businesses, are critically important because business leadership, managers,

and personnel are uniquely equipped to help schools prepare students for a challenging workplace” (p. 163). Furthermore, as recognized previously, businesses can often provide supplemental resources for schools, and, for that reason, many schools are attracted to school-business partnerships. In return, schools provide businesses with a workforce equipped with the specialized skills businesses need for continued success. As reflected within the literature, the benefits of community involvement in school appear to be academic, social, and financial.

Rural Communities. Particularly applicable to rural settings is the idea that community participation within schools is important for sustaining healthy communities (Corbett, 2007). The rural school is often one of the largest employers in a small community, and it may even be one of the largest landholders in a small town (Howley & Eckman, 1997). Rural schools often serve the community in the form of medical centers, dental centers, meeting squares, concert halls, and recreational areas (Howley & Eckman, 1997). The school represents a community’s largest investment because it serves the needs of the community, not just the students (Nachtigal, 1992). In these examples, community participation within a rural school has reciprocal benefits. The school provides the community with an educated youth and a community facility; the community provides the school with a student body and the educational taxes. In such a manner, community involvement in school is a symbiotic relationship that promotes the health and welfare of both the school and community (Preston, 2009b).

In many ways rural schools, as compared to larger urban schools, are better able to involve the community simply due to the fact that fewer students are usually enrolled in rural schools. Studies show that, on a per capita basis, rural students participate in

more extracurricular activities than urban students (Kearney, 1994; Saskatchewan School Boards Association, 2004). As one Saskatchewan rural principal stated: “On our [extracurricular] teams, there are no cuts. Everyone gets to play” (Warick, 2006, p. E1). In sum, extracurricular events sponsored by a rural school often incorporate a team, which represents a large portion of the student body. Thus, on a per capita basis, more rural parents are involved in their child’s extracurricular activities. Such parent involvement would involve attendance at student sports games and parents driving the students to and from extracurricular events.

Because rural schools often have a less complicated, more flexible structure in their deliverance of education (Collins, 1999; Kearney, 1994), rural schools tend to have a closer, more personal relationship with parents and the community at large (Howley & Eckman, 1997). This closer relationship may be why rural parents, as compared to urban parents, tend to be more actively involved with their schools (Erickson & McBeath, 1999; Howley & Eckman, 1997). For example, rural parents are more likely to have contact with their child’s school, and rural parents are more likely to view school officials as approachable (Newton, 1993). As well, the close home-school relationship has been shown to have a positive influence on the social values and skills displayed within its student body (Jimerson, 2006; Newton, 1993; Ralph, 2003).

Urban Communities. As reflected within many rural schools, community involvement in urban schools also produces specific benefits. Resnick et al. (1997) concluded that when urban adolescents have multiple family, school, and community support networks, they are less likely to be involved with crime, less likely to use alcohol and drugs, and more emotionally healthy. Sampson, Raudenbush, and Earl (1997)

analyzed the variability of violent crime in 343 Chicago neighborhoods. They suggested that higher levels of positive social cohesion among neighbors and community were associated with lower rates of violence. These examples illustrate that community involvement in urban environments may be a partial solution to social problems within a neighborhood.

Because of location, urban schools are in an ideal position to take advantage of the diverse pool of community resources available in the city. For example, as compared to rural schools, urban schools can more easily establish partnerships with postsecondary institutes, collaborate with a greater variety of businesses, and volunteer with a greater number of community associations (Snipes, Williams, & Petteruti, 2006). Isaac and Tempesta (2004) believed enhancing such school-community collaboration offers urban learners opportunities to develop social relationships, especially useful within disadvantaged communities. Enhancing social relationships means that students increase the social connections they have with others. In turn, urban students are often provided with positive role models, opportunities to explore new ideas, and opportunities to develop new ways of thinking about how the world works or ought to work (Isaac & Tempesta, 2004). In summary, as compared to rural educators, urban educators have greater opportunities to employ diverse forms of community involvement in their classrooms.

Challenges of School-Community Collaboration

One of my research questions specifically queried challenges associated with community involvement in school. Unlike the above section, this section is not

segregated into subsections, namely because there was a lack of diverse thematic information related to the topic.

A number of obstacles face schools and educators when they try to strengthen school-community relations. Depending on the school, some of these challenges may be more prevalent than others. In a survey conducted by Sanders (2001), principals, teachers, parents, and community members in 233 schools were asked what types of obstacles their school faced when trying to develop and expand community partnerships within their schools. Nearly 30% of respondents identified lack of teacher and community interest as the main obstacle to strong school-community partnerships. For example, some teachers stated that teaching responsibilities already consumed their energy; the additional task of endorsing community relationships within their classroom overwhelmed them. About 25% of participants responded that lack of time was a major concern. Respondents found it difficult to find the time to identify, contact, and meet with potential community partners. An additional 12% of respondents said identifying community partners was a primary obstacle. Some respondents indicated they were located in resource-poor, bereft communities. Additional challenges identified by survey respondents included inadequate administrative leadership, lack of funding, language barriers, and lack of dedication towards school-community partnerships.

An important issue to consider when promoting community involvement in a school is the attitude of the staff. In order to promote community involvement, educators often need to accept the assistance of people from outside the school. Dryfoos (1998) agreed, "Bringing a whole new team of [people] into a school can be very threatening to the personnel who work there" (p. 40). The principal's attitude and approach toward

fostering positive relationships between staff and new community members is pivotal to successful partnerships (Benson, 1999; Cushing & Kohl, as cited in Sanders 2001; Dryfoos, 1998). Jordan (1999) explained there are simple things that the principal can do to foster school-community relationships. Her suggestions included making the school available for community meetings, providing administrative representation at school-community events, advocating the involvement of staff and students in community events, and allowing the use of the school's equipment such as telephones and photocopiers for school-community activities.

Epstein (2001) identified added challenges affecting the development of successful school-community relations. Epstein acknowledged that coupling community programs and services with specific school improvement goals is often difficult. Epstein also recognized that school-community *partnership* infers that reciprocal benefits should be enjoyed by both the school and the community. For that reason, schools need to assume the responsibility of providing relevant services which will enrich the community. Again, this objective can be difficult to achieve.

A final challenge to promoting increased community involvement in schools deals with finance and is exemplified through Saskatchewan's School^{PLUS} initiative. Formally implemented in February 2002, School^{PLUS} is a framework that brings together a network of educational, health, and other social agencies in an effort to address holistic needs of students (Saskatchewan Learning, 2004). In order to implement School^{PLUS}, \$44 million was recommended for the 2001–2002 school year, with an additional \$70 million for the following three years (Tymchak, 2001a). The School^{PLUS} Steering Committee (2003) recognized major challenges associated with this substantial budgetary requirement of

increased community involvement with the school. During 2001–2004, the Saskatchewan government was responsible for only 40% of educational expenses, and 60% of funding was raised from local property taxes. In essence, this meant that communities were responsible for the majority of the additional expenses associated with the School^{PLUS} initiative. The School^{PLUS} Steering Committee (2003) stated, “Health, social and justice services ... that were previously supported by the provincial treasury, are now potentially an additional burden on the local tax base” (§ 5). Although the theoretical background of School^{PLUS} is commendable, the financial practicality of the framework is challenging. In addition, the extra administrative time it takes to manage this formalized integration of community within the school is a concern. For example, a community coordinator can be hired to identify programs, write proposals, monitor programs, and ensure the needs of students and the community are being met (Dryfoos, 1998). Hence, such encompassing forms of community involvement in school can be expensive.

School Councils and Community Involvement

What does the research say about school councils and their ability to influence community involvement in school? The information that follows addresses this question. First, I discuss concepts of decentralization and democracy and how these ideologies relate to school councils and community involvement. Next, I focus on the research of a number of authors who describe the potential school councils have upon community involvement in schools. Last, I highlight some of the general challenges faced by school councils as they attempt to influence community involvement in school.

Concepts of Decentralization, Democracy, and Local Representation

As mentioned within chapter 1, one of the underlying reasons for the creation of the SCC policy was that, through the SCC representatives, the decentralized needs of individual schools were acknowledged even after the amalgamation of Saskatchewan's school divisions. Ideally, the SCC is to reflect a decentralized voice of the school community.

Governing bodies within school environments are often associated with the concepts of decentralization and democracy. Decentralization of education is a governing tactic that devolves responsibilities and decisions to local authorities, thus promoting the contextualized needs of an area (Chapman, 1996). Townsend (1996) highlighted that a decentralized form of school governance potentially strengthens communities, especially when local authorities promote educational programs and curricula that endorse the prosperity and sustainability of a local area. Decentralized governance means being responsive to local concerns by giving community leaders and community members a voice in decision-making processes.

Decentralization of educational governance emphasizes cooperation among people, caring for the common good, and an opportunity for all to voice their opinions (Apple & Beane, 1995). Tolbert and Theobald (2006) believed that public education should be used to acculturate students into being active members of a democratic society. Moreover, the first step in producing this democratic citizenry is by ensuring that community responsibilities are a focus within the school culture (Tolbert & Theobald, 2006). One of the overarching aims of SCCs is to share a portion of responsibility for the students' learning and wellbeing with members of the school community. In this case,

sharing infers giving administrators, teachers, parents/community members, and students, all of whom are represented on the SCC, a distinctive voice in the education process.

In most western countries, democratic ideologies have been reflected within schools through various elective governing roles undertaken by parents and community members. Corter and Pelletier (2004) claimed that parent involvement, particularly in school governance, is and should be a democratic right—a right which does not need to be justified by increases in student achievement. As related to the SCC policy, parent involvement is reflected through elected membership on the SCC. In the context of my study, parental input pertaining to student achievement was justified through a formal democratic election process outlined within the SCC policy (Endsin & Melvin, n.d.).

The attitudes, values, politics, and historical events of a local community are significant factors to consider when promoting enriched school-community relations through the school council. Jordan (1999) believed that community involvement needs to incorporate elected officials, grassroots organizations, business interests, senior citizens, and community leaders, which are to reflect the cultural, social, and economic diversity of a community. Such information aligns with the tenets of the SCC policy. SCC representation should reflect the diversity of the community in terms of religion, culture, socioeconomic status, and businesses, for example. As Endsing and Melvin (n.d.) stated, “School Community Councils engage in processes to ensure all voices in the school community are heard and all perspectives are taken into account” (p. 8).

Benefits Associated with School Councils

Epstein (2001) expounded that the first step in promoting parent and community involvement in schools is to establish an *action team* within a school. Action team

membership is represented by teachers, parents, the administrator, and may include members from the community, middle school/high school student representation, and anyone else who is central to the school's mandate. Directed by Epstein's guidelines, an organization called the National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS) taught action teams how to attract community partnership programs. The NNPS and action teams mutually: (a) wrote annual plans intended to connect community with school improvement goals, (b) assessed the quality and progress of their intended programs, and (c) reviewed and improve plans and activities from year to year. Studies indicated when schools implemented this process, the quality and quantity of their family and community connections with the school greatly improved (Epstein, 2005; Sanders & Lewis, 2005; Sanders & Simon, 2002; Sheldon & Van Voorhis, 2004). In turn, this increased parent involvement in the school improved student achievement, attendance, attitude, and behavior (Catsambis, 2002; Epstein, 2001, 2005; Sanders et al., 1999; Sheldon, 2003). Longitudinal results of Epstein's research indicated that a minimum of three years is needed for an action team to become established and produce constructive results for the school (Epstein, 2005; Sheldon, 2003). A noticeable prerequisite of these successful school councils was consistent training. According to Epstein's research on action teams, school councils do increase parent and community involvement in the school, provided they are in existence for at least three years. Within my study, I attempted to affirm or contradict some of Epstein's conclusions.

Additional benefits of school councils include improved relationships between educators and parents, an increase in the number of parent advocates for the school, and an increase in parenting skills and confidence (Cotton & Wikelund, 1989). Hrycauk

(1997) claimed that school council members are ambassadors for the school and contribute public support. Hence, members of a school council are often fundamental in the acquisition of community resources and local information relating to curriculum topics (Dukacz & McCarthy, 1995). Pelletier (2002) believed an active school council is supportive for teachers, and Wyman (2001) stated that school councils improve the working conditions of educators. In addition, minor financial benefits may be the result of low-cost parent labor or parent volunteer associated with school councils. Endsien and Melvin (n.d.) believed that SCCs will, in fact, help to ensure that communication within the community remains strong. Stelmach and Preston (2008) concluded that SCCs play a bridging role in the communication between school and community.

The above research reinforces that school councils tend to serve as a type of social liaison between educators and parents and community members; however, other than the work conducted on Epstein's action teams, the research does not clearly indicate that school councils play a decisive role in influencing community involvement in school. My research is situated in the middle of this conflicting research and attempts to explain the impact school councils have on community involvement.

Challenges Associated with School Councils

There is some literature that suggests school councils have a marginal affect on community involvement (Parker & Leithwood, 2000). The reason for the limited influence of some school councils may be due to the multitude of challenges faced by school councils. For example, members on school councils may face power struggles and political conflicts associated with individual members (Flinspach & Ryan, 1994). Members may express a lack of interest in educational issues beyond the needs of their

own child (David, 1994). There may be a lack of understanding pertaining to roles and responsibilities of school council membership (Parker & Leithwood, 2000). As well, representation of culture and ethnic diversity is often inadequate or absent on school councils (Corter & Pelletier, 2005; National PTA, 2000).

A further challenge facing school councils is lack of training. Krishnamoorthi (2000) explained that training for school councils needs to be more than “reading a bunch of slides” (p. 304). A quality training program needs to have a flexible time schedule, expose multiple educative themes, and be hospitable towards ESL needs (Krishnamoorthi, 2000). Boylan (2005) supported the importance of providing training for school council members and stipulated that quality training needs to include services, which assist council members in identifying the needs of the school and community and enhancing communication between the school and the community.

David’s (1994) quantitative data revealed that the numbers of parents running for school council positions, voting in elections, and sitting on subcommittees were limited in size and voice. In an Ontario study, teachers, school council representatives, and parents were surveyed across several school boards (Corter et al., 1998). The survey focused on how members within the community viewed the importance, effectiveness, and viability of school councils. The results of the study highlighted that most community members did not know the names of their school council representatives, and non-school council members were not interested in serving on the school council in the future.

My findings add a further dimension to the literature, because, methodologically, my research differs from the aforementioned quantitative studies. Through a semi-

structured interviewing process, I was able to probe for participant understanding. By conducting semi-structured interviews with teachers and community members not serving on the SCC, I was able to document what community members understood about the role their school council served within the school community. All of these issues were not addressed in any of the research I read pertaining to school councils

A pertinent example of additional challenges associated with school councils is illustrated within an Alberta context. Following the new *School Act* in 1988, Advisory Parent Councils were required in each Alberta school, if requested by parents. A review of such councils three years later showed that, in general, they were not functioning as anticipated (Rideout, 1995), mainly because the government made these councils *advisory* in nature, negating any formal governance or decision-making power by the council (Booi, 2000). Rideout (1995) proposed that if parents and community members are to be given meaningful involvement through school councils, they need to be freed from their “advisory strait jacket” (p. 13) and be given some actual decision-making power. Within my study, SCCs assume only an advisory role in school governance. Perhaps the SCC’s advisory role has an effect on the SCC’s ability to influence community involvement in school.

Additional research pertaining to the challenges faced by school councils highlights the voluntary nature of the association. Stelmach and Preston (2008) recognized, for example, that voluntary members on the council may be ill-equipped to deal with highly specialized educational decisions such as creating and implementing school improvement plans. Similarly, Preston and Stelmach (2008) recognized this issue when they quoted a principal’s views on the topic: “So you want to have representation

from your marginalized group ... if you are talking about quite complex subjects like reading comprehension and mathematics, you might actually drive those folks away” (¶ 25). In addition, Veeman et al. (2006) explained that the capacity of voluntary group is eroded when increased accountability and self-sufficiency pressures are bestowed upon them. School council membership may place excessive demands on parents’ time (Hallinger, Murphy, & Hausman, 1992; Hrycauk, 1997), which may have a negative effect on an individual’s decision to join school councils.

An obvious void in the literature pertaining to school councils is the lack of research focusing of Saskatchewan’s SCCs. Understandably, this lack of research is partially because SCCs have only been in existence since 2006. Nonetheless, my study is important because it represents some of the first research conducted on SCCs. With the need for my research established, I explain the conceptual framework I used to analyze the data, within the next section.

Analytical Framework: Social Capital Theory

The influence that a school council exerts on community involvement in a school can be studied from a number of philosophical perspectives. With that said, the efficacy of school councils is closely aligned with the concept of interpersonal relationships (Epstein, 2001, 2005; Kerr, 2003, 2005; Melvin, 2006). Furthermore, the definition of community encompasses various networks and bonds between people (Bauman, 2004; Putnam, 1993, 2000; Portes & Sensenbrenner, 2001). For those reasons, school councils and their impact on community involvement was examined utilizing social capital theory (Bourdieu, 1984, 2001, 2002; Coleman, 1988, 1990; Putnam, 1993, 1995a, 1995b, 2000, 2007).

The Origin and Growth of Social Capital

The concept of social capital has become one of the most popular ideas adopted within and exported from sociological theory (Portes, 1998). Not only has social capital become increasingly popular within the social sciences, it has been adapted to a wide range of social policies pertaining to health, education, community development, and poverty alleviation (Woolcock, 1998). Portes (1998) explained that social capital is viewed by many leaders and policymakers as a universal remedy that can be applied to the multitude of maladies affecting society.

The concept of social capital was initially portrayed through the writings of three key scholars: Bourdieu, Coleman, and Putnam. Bourdieu (1984) related the concept of social capital to cultural capital. Bourdieu posited that together social and cultural capital are a leverage that can be used to enhance financial security and social stability, especially for elite groups of people. Bourdieu (2001, 2002) described social capital as the aggregate of resources utilized within social networks, providing people with valuable and varying credentials, all of which can be utilized for myriad personal and professional gains. In contrast, Coleman (1988, 1990) emphasized that social capital is embodied in personal relationships, which are specifically relevant within the social contexts of education. According to Coleman, social capital is a core asset needed both by a student and the student's family to acquire a quality education and advance human capital. Both Bourdieu and Coleman emphasized that social capital is created and maintained through an individual's social contacts; however, Bourdieu predominantly acknowledged social capital as a good consciously acquired and maintained by individual effort. In contrast,

Coleman largely perceived social capital as an unintentional outcome resulting from social interactions.

Putnam's (1993) initial reference to social capital was used to describe the strengths and problems specifically related to Italian economics, governance, and institutional performances. Later, as Putnam worked on civic engagement within the United States, he introduced what has perhaps become the most popularized definition of the term: "features of social life—networks, norms, and trust—that enable participants to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives" (Putnam, 1995a, pp. 664–665). It is Putnam's definition of social capital that I applied as the theoretical dimensions of my study.

There are a number of reasons why Putnam's description of social capital is compatible with my research. To begin, school councils are a type of social network whose success is dependent upon trust (Kerr, 2003), and Putnam (2000) emphasized the idea that trust is a criterion necessary to secure social capital (p. 300). Second, as outlined by the SCC policy, SCCs do share, as described by Putnam, group objectives. For example, one purpose of SCCs is to increase community involvement in schools, which is the center of my study. Also, Putnam's work (1993; 1995a; 1995b; 2000; 2007), focused on the effect that social capital and ensuring relationships have on community development. This focus of Putnam's work aligns with my research question: How do social relationships affect the amount and type of community participation that is reflected within schools?

Not only does much of my research compare favorably with Putnam's work, it applies his social capital ideologies in a novel fashion, thereby filling an important role in

the literature pertaining to social capital. Putnam's work examined the social relationships found in Italian (1993) and American (1995a; 1995b; 2000) societies. He achieved this aim by using positivistic statistical analyses of data that represented large sample sizes of national populations. For my research, I applied Putnam's work to a case study undertaken in one Saskatchewan bedroom community. My research was located in the constructivist paradigm, and I utilized semi-structured qualitative interviews as the main data source. Within his writings, Putnam (2007) acknowledged that his quantitative approach is only one methodological facet in the study of social capital and that there is a need for researchers to explore social capital using qualitative methods. My study helps to achieve this objective.

Bonding, Bridging, and Linking Social Capital

Putnam (2000) categorized social capital into two sub-forms: bonding and bridging. Hall (2007) later added a third form of social capital called linking social capital. Each of these forms of social capital is described below.

Bonding social capital pertains to close connections between people as characterized among family members, close friends, and ethnic and religious groups (Hall, 2007; Pelling & High, 2005; Putnam, 2000). Communities demonstrating strong internal cohesion and a cooperative mindset among its members fluidly share knowledge and display high levels of bonding social capital. Putnam (2000) recognized bonding social capital to be beneficial for building reciprocity and mobilizing solidarity within a community because it involves a sense of trust and mutual obligation towards one another. This type of social capital is displayed within many contexts. Portes and Landolt (1996) recognized that in poor areas, people often rely on bonding social capital

for economic survival. Strong levels of bonding social capital are also often displayed within communities that have endured major hardships or natural disasters (Pelling, 2003). In these situations, individuals depend on personal close-knit groups and, thereby, may withdraw from maintaining association with diverse social groups.

Ideas pertaining to bonding social capital are applicable to my research because my study was based within a small rural-like community where strong bonding ties with family and close friends were likely to exist. Through my research questions, I explored the concept of community involvement by utilizing the analytical approach of bonding social capital to highlight the strengths of close social networks.

The second type of social capital, bridging social capital, is identified through the broader, more distant connections that exist between people (Putnam, 2000). This type of social capital has the potential to unite people from other communities, cultures, or socioeconomic backgrounds. Bridging ties are often used to describe social relationships between people who have contrasting social identities but share common interests or goals (Pelling & High, 2005) as reflected through business associates, personal acquaintances, and friends of friends (Hall, 2007). Daniel, Schwier, and McCalla (2003) explained that people within communities that manifest characteristics of bridging social capital welcome information from outside the community and remain updated about non-local issues. Bridging ties are also apparent within relationships that cross boundaries in a vertical direction such as between social classes or through donations given from successful businesses to less fortunate peoples and/or organizations (Pelling & High, 2005).

The concept of bridging social capital is an important analytical dimension for my study. Because my research was based in a bedroom community, school council and community members had potential to access and possess bridging social capital, which they could accrue from being employed by businesses located in the city and from utilizing recreational resources located in the city. School council and community members could readily access bridging social capital, which, as indicated above, has positive implications for accessing outside resources that may enrich community involvement.

Access to and the amount of bonding and bridging social capital vary depending upon the community. For example, compared to an urban community, a small remote town likely displays higher amounts of bonding social capital and limited amounts of bridging social capital (Putnam, 2000). Traditionally in small towns, people share a common culture and, because of location, that town's culture is somewhat sheltered from outside influences. With that said, these days technological advancement vis-à-vis computers, the Internet, email, and cell phones has the potential to break down geographical barriers and potentially increase levels of bridging social capital within even remote communities.

As opposed to a rural community, an urban community with a populace displaying ethnic and employment diversity is in a position to take advantage of bridging social capital opportunities. In other words, heterogeneity of perspectives, races, interests, and educational attainment potentially yield rich prospects for diverse social networks. Nevertheless, as compared to rural communities, people in cities attend fewer

club meetings, attend church less frequently, are less likely to serve on a committee, and are less likely to attend public meetings (Putnam, 2000).

As recognized previously, my research is based within a bedroom community, which possesses both rural and urban attributes. This research adds to the literature, which predominantly only explores the social capital of rural and urban communities.

Working with British National Statistics, Hall (2007) identified a third type of social capital called linking social capital. Linking social capital relates to connections with influential people or prominent organizations (Hall, 2007). Blakely and Ivory (2006) explained that linking social capital is reflected by people who interact within formal, institutionalized power or authority. In effect, linking social capital enables individuals or communities to have greater leverage for acquiring resources, ideas, information, and knowledge. An illustration of linking social capital is when citizens work collaboratively with provincial or federal government agencies to secure public programs within their community. Any community member who works within governmental agencies would be more knowledgeable about such programs and would therefore possess a form of linking social capital that could be highly influential in securing funds. As applied to my research, any linking social capital possessed by school council and community members may provide a segue for additional and/or dynamic forms of community involvement in school.

Woolcock and Narayan (2000) summed up the foundational ideologies of social capital when they said, “The basic idea of social capital is that a person’s family, friends and associates constitute an important asset, one that can be called on in a crisis, enjoyed for its own sake, and leveraged for gain” (p. 3). Moreover, these authors argued that

what is true for individuals is also true for communities. As compared to communities with limited social capital, those communities endowed with a stronger stock of social capital can more easily confront and negotiate local challenges and take advantage of diverse opportunities. One of the research questions of my study queried how social relationships influence the amount and type of community involvement reflected in a school community. The answer to this question supplied a unique insight into understanding the role a school council played in encouraging community involvement in a bedroom community school.

The above information describes the various forms of social capital that may exist within a community. What if social capital does not appear to be present? Burt (1992) and Papachristos (2006) described the absence of social capital with the term *structural hole*. A structural hole refers to a gap in a social network or the absence of a tie between two parties or members (Papachristos, 2006). A person who fills such a hole can control the flow of information, resources, or action between two otherwise unconnected parts of the network (Burt, 1992). This person may act as a middleperson, harboring a beneficial connection between that person's original organization and an outside party. When a structural hole exists, an actor links people or organizations that may not otherwise be connected. In this sense, social capital is utilized as a type of brokerage created by structural holes (Papachristos, 2006). My study adds to the literature because none of the information I pursued identified structural holes that may deter community involvement in school.

Where Social Capital Is Amassed

Bonding, bridging, and linking are the recognized forms of social capital. An additional aspect of the social capital concept is concerned with identifying a variety of contexts where social capital is potentially amassed. Within my research, I queried how school councils influence community involvement in the school, and how various types of relationships influence community involvement in school. An analytical answer for these questions requires a general understanding of how the age, volunteerism, religion, mobility tendencies, educational attainment, and socioeconomic status of the community members are linked to social capital and community involvement.

Halpern (2005) explained that specific age groups show different patterns of civic and social engagement. Older people are more strongly tied to their communities and display higher levels of bonding social capital, whereas younger people have a larger diversified network of friends, illustrating higher levels of bridging social capital. The General Household Survey conducted by British National Statistics revealed 33% of people aged 16 to 29 saw friends daily as compared to 15% of those aged 50 and over (Coulthard, Walker, & Morgan, 2000). With that stated, about 50% of people aged 50 and over spoke to their neighbors daily as compared to only 17% of those aged 16–29 (Coulthard et al., 2000). These age-dependent statistics suggest that although younger people have a more diverse group of friends, those individuals 50 years and older have a tighter nucleus of friends who are physically located nearer to them.

Many proponents of social capital theory label volunteering (a key aspect of community involvement) as a strong source of social capital (e.g., Halpern, Putnam, & Woolcock). In most countries, volunteering peaks in the late 30s, continues through the

late 40s, and drops thereafter (Halpern, 2005). In turn, volunteering tends to rise again after retirement and eventually drops off as aging and frailty ensues (Halpern, 2005). Interestingly, volunteering and religion are related in that people who are religious are associated with greater levels of volunteering. The *Canada Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating* found that those who are religious not only tend to volunteer more, they trust others more, and go to more association meetings (Hall, Lasby, Gumulka, & Tryon, 2006), all of which increase personal levels of social capital and positively influence community involvement. Hall et al. (2006) also recognized that about 50% of Canadians who volunteer are also involved with one or more additional volunteer groups.

Community member mobility is also an issue related to social capital. People who often change residences have lower levels of bonding social capital (Kang & Kwak, 2003; Putnam, 2000; Sampson et al., 1997; Teachman, Paasch, & Carver, 1996). Glaeser, Laibson, and Sacerdote (2002) found that even the anticipation of moving is associated with a drop in an individual's civic and social engagement. Such information implies that rural individuals who live out their lives in a small town location probably have high levels of social capital, particularly bonding social capital; however, with Canadian rural populations declining (Rothwell, Bollman, Tremblay, & Marshall, 2002), the quantity of rural individuals holding these high levels of bonding social capital may also be dwindling. Conversely, migration from Canadian urban areas to bedroom communities is on the increase (Rothwell et al., 2002). Putnam (2000) explained that commuting large distances to work also has a limiting effect upon social capital because it reduces the time a person devotes to family, community activities, and informal

socializing. Halpern (2005) found a correlation between busy streets and lower levels of social capital. He stated that busy transport routes “divide and degrade communities” because the more vehicles that drive along a street, the less likely the residents on that street will know their neighbors or describe their neighbors as friendly (Halpern, 2005, p. 263).

As previously stated, generalization of socioeconomic class and education are associated with identifiable levels of social capital. Mid-socioeconomic classes have larger and more diverse social networks and thereby report higher levels of social trust and community involvement (Goldthorpe, Llewellyn, & Payne, 1987; Halpern, 2005). Education has also been shown to be associated with higher levels of social capital (Halpern, 2005; Putnam, 2000). The more years of formal education an individual acquires, the larger and more diverse is his social networks. Halpern (2005) reported that attending university appears to be associated with a particularly strong boost to a person’s social trust, tolerance of community, and voluntary engagement. Studies show that the occupations most common within rural communities are characterized by lower wages and lower levels of educational attainment (Burnell, 2003; Harmon, 1999; Ronan-Herzog & Pittman, 1995). Based on this information, social capital levels within rural communities, as compared to urban communities, is lower.

A key component to the viability of a community is reflected through the demographic attributes and social tendencies of its populace. In the above literature, I highlighted the idea that specific characteristics of people and their lifestyles both promote and demote social capital potential. As applied to my research, these characteristics may be variables that influence the amount and type of community

involvement a SCC is able to entice from the school community. That is, in my research I focused on school councils, community involvement, and bedroom communities while incorporating a theoretical analysis of the social capital possessed by community members. Through the combination of these concepts, this research offers a new perspective not previously explored.

Chapter Summary

Within this chapter, I presented a review of the literature pertaining to the role school councils play in encouraging community involvement in a K to 12 bedroom community school. The various aspects of social capital theory were explained. By documenting the perceptions and lived experiences of my specific participants and thereafter filtering this information through a social capital lens, this study contributes to the collective knowledge about school councils and their ability to influence community involvement in school. In the following chapter I outline the research methodology I employed for this research.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Within this chapter, I describe the research paradigm in which this study is located. Site and participant selections are explained, as are the methods of data collection and analysis procedures. The trustworthiness of and ethical considerations for my research are also addressed.

The Constructivist Paradigm

All research is located within a paradigm that reflects a conceptualized means of processing research phenomena. Guba (1990) formally defined paradigm as “a basic set of beliefs that guide action” (p. 17). Denzin and Lincoln (2005) added that the researcher’s epistemological and ontological assumptions determine in which paradigm his/her research will be located. Guba and Denzin and Lincoln claimed that research is constructed, interpreted, and defined by a researcher’s set of beliefs pertaining to how the world is organized and studied.

I located my qualitative research within what Denzin and Lincoln (2005) referred to as the constructivist paradigm. This paradigmatic standpoint incorporates two main philosophical principles. First, a subjectivist epistemology is supported by the belief that knowledge is filtered through the interpretations of individual people and, hence, differentially defined (Schwandt, 2007). Second, a relativist ontology assumes reality is malleable in that there exist multiple truths regarding the nature of society (Burrell & Morgan, 1985; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). In other words, because a situation can be

experienced differently by various people, there can exist several accounts of the same incident. Under a constructivist frame, Schwandt (2002) believed one should not attempt to impose conventional order upon the “messiness of human practices” (p. 63). Thus, the meaning derived from the data is unique and non-generalizable beyond the particular research case.

The purpose of my study was to explore the role a school council played in encouraging community involvement in a K to 12 Saskatchewan bedroom community school, as perceived by SCC members, teachers, and community members. The intent of my study was to try to understand the diverse beliefs and realities of participants in ways that honor their unique experiences, viewpoints, and situations. The constructivist stance endorses participant individuality, subjectivity, and voice, while capturing the situational experiences of participants. In sum, my research purpose, research questions, and personal beliefs align with the constructivist paradigm.

Case Study

Disciplined research is characterized by thoughtful decisions associated with choosing a research method ideally suited for a particular study (Lincoln, 1995). Trochim (2006) explained that choosing the appropriate research method is like applying glue to the various elements of a study, thereby strengthening the research. This metaphoric research glue comes in a variety of brands such as case study, ethnography, autoethnography, phenomenology, grounded theory, action research, and clinical research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 23). Hay (1999) reminded researchers that there is no such thing as a single correct research method for a study; the most appropriate design is dependent upon the purpose of the study and the research questions (Denzin & Lincoln,

2005). In order to achieve my research purpose, the chosen research design needed to allow me to understand multiple perspectives, to search for patterns, to be in close proximity with participants, and to contextualize findings. My purpose and research questions reflected the predominant conceptualizations of research participants. One research method that allowed for these recognized research requirements was case study. Guided by research questions, I studied a case in question and aspects of the environment that pertained both to that research purpose and accommodated the research questions.

Stake (2005, 2010) recommended that case study research should be centered upon a particular situation or setting. As well, Stake indicated that case studies should describe how some type of social activity influences a particular situation or setting. Aligning Stake's recommendations with my research, the setting under scrutiny was a bedroom community; the social activity under focus was the SCC's influence on community involvement in schools. When using a case study, Stake provided additional advice to researchers. Stake (2000) encouraged researchers to direct their energy toward studying practical programs and to be attentive to stakeholder concerns. For my research, I examined the community involvement component of the SCCs policy. Stakeholder voice was represented through semi-structured interviews conducted with SCC members, teachers, and community members, as well through my observation at SCC meetings and my journal reflections.

Researchers who propose to do case study should have a firm grasp of the issue or phenomenon under question (Stake, 2000; Yin, 2003). I have background knowledge and experience with regard to SCCs. As stated previously, I conducted pilot research on SCCs with my supervisor (see Stelmach & Preston, 2008). In addition to writing course

term papers pertaining to SCCs, I also published two SCC-related articles in peer reviewed journals (see Preston, 2008b; 2009a) and two SCC-related articles in professional journals (see Preston 2008a; 2009c). As well, in the past four years, I presented information pertaining to SCCs at several national and international conferences. In May 2008, I was the keynote speaker at the 70th Annual Parent Conference sponsored by the Saskatchewan Association of School Councils. As well, in 2008 and 2009, I led SCC roundtable discussions during the 13th and 14th National Congress on Rural Education in Canada. Complementing this academic background, I have hands-on SCC experience through my two-year membership on an SCC prior to collecting data for this study.

Site and Participant Selection

In what follows, I explain how I selected the research site for this study. I also highlight how I selected the participants for this study.

Site Selection

After obtaining ethics approval for this study from the University of Saskatchewan Behaviour Research Ethics Board (see Appendix A), I sent a letter to the Director of a school division (see Appendix B), which had schools located in bedroom communities. My request to the Director was forwarded both to the Superintendent and Coordinator of Schools and Learning. Upon the request of the Superintendent, I personally met with the Coordinator of Schools and Learning. After acquiring written consent from the Superintendent of Schools and Learning, via email, I contacted the principal of Sunshine School², a K to 12 bedroom community school within that school division (see Appendix C). I particularly chose to contact this principal because Sunshine

² For purposes of anonymity, pseudonyms are used throughout this document.

School was a K to 12 school and was located in a bedroom community, which aligned with my definition of bedroom community. This principal displayed a general interest in the study. I supplied her with a written description of the study, a copy of the individual interview questions, and a consent form indicative of participant rights (see Appendices D–H). After the principal reviewed these documents, I asked her for permission to contact the SCC chairperson. I contacted the SCC chairperson by telephone (see Appendix C) and asked him/her if I could have approximately 10 minutes during the next SCC meeting to discuss my research and invite the SCC members to participate in my study. Before attending the SCC meeting, I supplied the chairperson with written information pertaining to my research (see Appendices D–I). Upon the chairperson's invitation, I visited her home to verbally explain these documents. The chairperson agreed that I could attend an SCC meeting and at that meeting invite SCC members to participate in my study.

Participant Selection

During my attendance at the SCC meeting, I distributed a research information package (see Appendices D–I) to all SCC members and verbally explained the components of my study. In addition to semi-structured individual interviews, I had initially planned to conduct a focus group with SCC members; however, due to time constraints of the SCC members and, as suggested by the chairperson, it was agreed that Sunshine's SCC would not participate in a focus group. Rather, individual SCC members would contact me if they were interested in participating in the study. The end result was that five female SCC members volunteered to participate in the study.

In an effort to capture an array of perspectives, it was my intention to include a cross-selection of teachers and community members (not on the SCC) as participants in this study. With the principal's approval, I began the process of selecting teachers to interview. First, I asked the principal for permission to place a research information package in all of the teachers' school mailboxes. Initially, no teachers volunteered to participate in the study. I then forwarded a personal email to all teachers and attached information of my study. Although I had hoped to gain the perspective of teachers who represented gender and grade level diversity, in the end, three female teachers volunteered to participate in the study. I had initially wanted teachers who represented the elementary, middle school, and high school divisions; however, in the end, two teachers were from the elementary division and one teacher was a middle years educator.

To select community member participants, I used purposeful random (Mertens, 2005) and snowball sampling (Creswell, 2005). I asked the principal, SCC members, and teachers for names of community members who might be interested in the study. Then after I interviewed each community member, I asked that individual if he/she knew of others who might be interested in volunteering for this study.

My search for a cross-section of community members also included an Internet search of the community. From this search, I retrieved the names of a list of people who lived within the community, including the mayor, the reeve, and representatives within various community organizations. I used the phonebook and websites to retrieve the telephone numbers of potential participants. I phoned these contacts and explained the purpose and focus of the study (see Appendix C). In addition to the names of potential participants I collected through snowball sampling, I wanted to ensure that I had

representation from the local community, those who may not have been directly associated with the school community. All interested potential participants received a written description of the study, a copy of the interview questions, and a copy of the consent form (see Appendices D–H).

I continued with the above sampling process until I reached saturation of data. That is, I continued to interview participants until I perceived that I was collecting no new information pertaining to my research purpose (Creswell, 2007). At the point of interview saturation, much of what my participants revealed to me was already highlighted in preceding interviews. In my reflective journal, I provided a personal example of what saturation of data meant for this study:

With regard to community involvement, [this participant] provided a gamut of examples. The interesting part is that I already knew of every example from having interviewed past participants. In fact, I could provide her with additional examples she missed. I think this is a sign that my interviews are reaching data saturation. (Journal, p. 55, line 10)

Description of Participants

In total, I interviewed 17 people for this research: 14 people participated in two interviews, two people participated in three interviews, and one participant was interviewed once. Some of the questions for the second interview and all of the questions for the third interview were based on topics arising from participant comments during previous interviews. Overall, I conducted 35 semi-structured, individual interviews during a seven-month time period. Initially, I had intended to interview approximately four SCC members, four teachers, and four community members, all of whom were to be interviewed two to three times each. As it turned out, I interviewed five SCC members, three teachers, and nine community members. I interviewed more community members

than I had initially intended for a number of reasons. First, I was unable to obtain a Data Transcript Release Form from one community member (Amy); thus, I destroyed her transcripts by destroying the data from the two interviews I completed with her. Second, early into my data collection, I realized four community members did not represent the demographic and social diversity of Sunshine's populace; thus, in an effort to reach data saturation, I extended the number of community members to nine.

The final group of participants reflected diversity of gender, age, socioeconomic status, and profession. The participants' ages ranged from 18 to about 80 years old. Fourteen participants were female, and three participants were male. Although, I attempted to achieve a higher male representation of participants, the vast majority of Sunshine's SCC members and teachers were female. As mentioned above, two teachers were from the elementary department of the school and one teacher was a middle years educator. Their teaching experiences varied from a few years to 15-plus years of teaching. Of the 17 participants, eight participants lived on farms or acreages surrounding the community of Sunshine, seven participants lived within the community of Sunshine, and two teachers did not live in the greater community of Sunshine, but taught at Sunshine School. Of the participants interviewed, eight individuals had children attending the local school; nine participants did not have children enrolled in the school.

Table 1 depicts characteristics of the participants. More specifically, Table 1 outlines: (a) the participant's names; (b) whether they were an SCC member, teacher, or community member; (c) whether the participants lived in the town of Sunshine, the greater community of Sunshine, or were not from Sunshine; (d) the gender of the

participants; (e) the number of times the participants were interviewed; and (f) whether or not the participants had children attending Sunshine School.

Table 1

Participant Description

Participant Name	Membership	Where participant lived?	Gender	Number of Interviews	Child(ren) attend Sunshine School?
Lilly	SCC	Outside Sunshine	F	2	yes
Lynn	SCC	Outside Sunshine	F	2	yes
Ella	SCC	Outside Sunshine	F	2	yes
April	SCC	Within Sunshine	F	2	yes
Zoe	SCC	Outside Sunshine	F	2	yes
Tanya	Teacher	Not from community	F	2	no
Janelle	Teacher	Outside Sunshine	F	2	no
Meagan	Teacher	Not from community	F	2	no
Tabitha	Community	Outside Sunshine	F	3	yes
Ricky	Community	Within Sunshine	M	2	yes
Alice	Community	Within Sunshine	F	2	no
Crystal	Community	Outside Sunshine	F	2	no
Amy	Community	Within Sunshine	F	2	no
Kate	Community	Within Sunshine	F	2	yes
Mark	Community	Within Sunshine	M	3	no
Cory	Community	Outside Sunshine	M	2	no
Brittany	Community	Within Sunshine	F	1	no

Data Collection and Analysis

For this study, semi-structured individual interviews were my primary source of data. To supplement the data collection, I attended three SCC meetings over a four-month period, made 11 community/school visits, and maintained a personal journal throughout the interview process. A detailed description of these primary and augmented data collection methods are presented below.

Primary Data: Semi-Structured Individual Interviews

Because interviewing is one of the most powerful ways to understand the perspectives of others (Fontana & Frey, 2005), the primary data source for this research was individual semi-structured interviews (Creswell, 2005). The purposes for undertaking individual interviews was to obtain a personalized “*here-and-now*” construction of persons, events, activities, organizations, feelings, motivations, claims, concerns, and other entities” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 268). Such interviews were highly personal because the interactive social process provided insight into the participant’s lived experience (Ponterotto & Grieger, 2007). The open format of semi-structured interviews allowed discussion between the participant and me (Mason, 2002), and, through such a process, understanding and meaning was coproduced. In this manner, I recognized the semi-structured individual interviews as a means of construction and reconstruction of knowledge, rather than an excavation of set ideas (Mason, 2002).

Yin (2003) recommended that a pilot test be conducted for case study interviews. He noted that such an action assists in both refining data collection plans and developing quality interview questions. I conducted two pilot interviews, one session to test my first set of interview questions and one session to test my second set of interview questions. Each of these pilot interviews was conducted with the same person who was knowledgeable about SCCs.

Logistically, the pilot interview assisted me with identifying technical issues before collecting interview data. For example, during my pilot interview, I tested the quality of the two digital recorders I planned to use for future interviews. Ergonomically, I discovered where I needed to place the recorders to best capture the participant’s voice.

My pilot participant and I discovered that a 90° seating arrangement between us was the most comfortable for my participant. As Merriam (1998) noted, “Pilot interviews are crucial for trying out your questions ... [discovering] which questions are confusing and need rewording, which questions yield useless data, and which questions, suggested by your respondents, you should have thought to include in the first place” (p. 76). In my case, my pilot participant suggested that I add two questions, one for each interview. I followed her advice. After the pilot interviews were completed, my participant and I reviewed the wording of each question. In order to improve the quality of some questions, I made minor phrasing revisions. The length of the pilot interviews proved to be in line with my expectations. One interview was just over an hour in length, and the other interview was just under one hour long.

After the pilot testing, I collected the primary research data by conducting 35 semi-structured individual interviews, all of which were recorded. Thirty-three of the interviews were done face-to-face, and two of the interviews were conducted over the phone. To tape telephone conversations, I utilized a phone speaker and placed the recorders near the phone. For reasons of anonymity, I ensured that during these interviews, no one besides me was present within the room in which I conducted the telephone interview.

Griffie (2005) reminded researchers that raw data, such as interview transcripts, do not in themselves reveal meaning; rather, transcripts must be interpreted. Hitchcock and Hughes (1995) described two main components of data interpretation. The first aspect is to become familiar with the data; the second component is to create meaning using analytical categories and themes.

My initial step toward becoming familiar with the data involved me listening to each interview and personally transcribing it (Silverman, 2005). After transcribing each interview, I presented my interpretation of the interview into a one-to-two page summary. Then I returned both the interview transcript and my interpretive summary of the transcript to each participant. To ensure that I captured the intended meanings within both the transcript and my interpretations of the transcript, each participant performed a member check (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) on both documents. After completion of the interviews, I reread all of the transcripts again to gain additional familiarity with content (Cole & Knowles, 2000; Creswell, 2007).

In an effort to create meaning, I reread each participant's interview again, but more systematically to create categories of key ideas, phrases, commonalities, differences, and patterns that were embedded in the transcripts (Basil, 2003; Stake 2005). For example, for research question #1, seven general categories emerged from the participants' transcripts: SCC examples of community involvement, SCC's evolving influence, SCC as a community advocate, SCC's limited influence in classroom, SCC newness, lack of SCC communication, and lack of SCC knowledge within the school community. Within each of these categories, I subdivided the data into the study's three participant groups: SCC members, teachers, and community members. At this point, in an effort to further connect this data, I read and reread the information and converged the multiple categorical themes into larger theme(s) in response to the research questions (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Creswell, 1998). For example, the larger theme that represented the categorical data for research question #1 was that the SCC's influence on community was evolving. After the predominant themes were created, all interviews

were reread again ensuring that the data represented in each theme answered the research questions. In the last phase of the study, an external auditor ensured that the quotations used in the dissertation conformed to the narratives provided by the participants (see Appendix I). A description of these stages of data analysis is highlighted below in *Figure 1*.

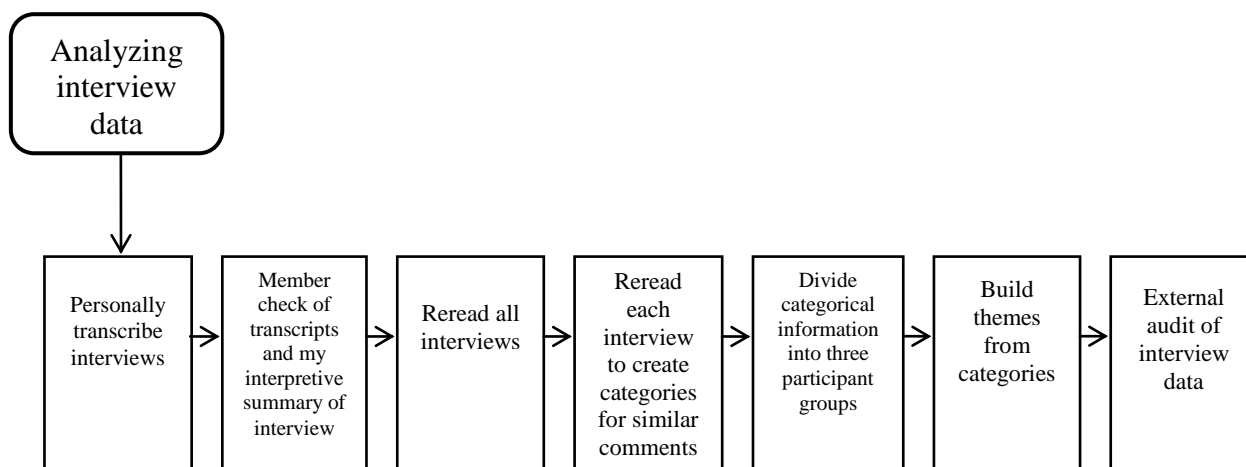


Figure 1. Steps taken to analyze interview data.

Augmented Data: Attendance at SCC Meetings, Community/School Visits, and Reflective Journal

In keeping with case study design (Stake 2005) and to improve the trustworthiness of emergent themes gathered from the transcripts, interview data were augmented by my attendance at three SCC meetings (Angrosino, 2005; Stake 2000). Being present at SCC meetings allowed me to personally meet SCC members, listen to the content of meetings, and observe the manner and surroundings in which meetings took place. Field notes taken during SCC meetings documented such things as the seating arrangement and conversational topics. I witnessed how SCC members socially interacted each other with before, during, and after meetings. This experience allowed

me to triangulate what participants said during the interviews with what they actually did (Heck, 2006).

As well, during my seven months of data collection, I made a total of 11 community/school visits: six community and five school visits. The community visits were one to two hours each in length and included the following activities: eating a meal at the local café (two separate occasions), attending the Community Fall Supper, taking pictures of the services and facilities of Sunshine, having a picnic with my family in the school park, and driving the gravel roads surrounding the community. The purpose of the community visits was to observe the customs, surroundings, and socialization practices of the community and/or its members. These experiences provided information surrounding a number of key background questions related to my study. What type of services and employment opportunities were present within the town and greater community? What language did the people speak in the community? What was the predominant age group of community members? Did people tend to socializing with each other? How did people dress? What was the topic of the day? What were the landmarks surrounding the town? Did there appear to be a number of out-of-town people visiting the community?

My school visits ranged in length from two hours to an entire school day and included the following activities: attending the school's Awards Night and Christmas Concert, attending a Parent Math Night sponsored by the SCC, and spending three school days in Sunshine School presenting a workshop to students. The purpose of the school visits was to observe the customs, surroundings, and socialization practices of the school and/or teachers and students. As a result of these visits, I became familiar with the physical outlay of the school, and I personally met a number of teachers and support

staff. I noted such things as the demeanor of the students, the organization of the school day, the average class size, and the apparent ethnic and socioeconomic statuses of the students. I made small talk with a number of parents and listened as they described various characteristics of the school and its staff.

As with my attendance at SCC meetings, the community/school visits allowed me to triangulate what participants said during the interviews with what I actually observed to be happening within the school community (Heck, 2006). Additional benefits ensued from these visits. I became familiar with the community roads and landmarks, and, thus, it was easier to find the residences of the participants who chose to be interviewed in their homes. During the interviews, when participants talked about specific community facilities, I often had a good understanding of what they were describing because I had personally visited these places. My familiarity with their community and its services appeared to put the participants at greater ease while being interviewed. For example, when participants talked about certain school programs or teachers, I nodded my head because I had personal knowledge of what they referred to. At other times during the interviews, participants told me of specific details, which did not appear to correspond to what I witnessed during my time spent in the school community. During such instances, I was able to ask questions to the participants to clarify meaning. In such a manner, I had first-hand experience of many of the community/school details, which were immersed in the interview data. Furthermore, due to my community/school visits, I was also able to do a form of member check during the interview process.

My third form of augmented data was the use of a reflective journal, which I maintained while I conducted interviews. Schwartz, Lederman, and Crawford (2004)

claimed journal writing is a powerful way to explore, connect, and deepen an individual's understanding about her research. Fischer (2009) maintained that journal writing is one way of becoming aware of personal assumptions and feelings and striving to put them aside, or bracket them, in order to be open and receptive to intricacies of the topic at hand. Similar to observational field notes, my reflective journal supplied a written description of the research site and of the participants. Within my reflective journal, I also documented my thoughts and views of each interview shortly after it was completed. My reflective journal also served as a triangulated source of data. In the presentation of the data results, I included a number of journal excerpts. These passages predominantly served as a reinforcement of the dominant themes that surfaced from the interview data.

Trustworthiness of Research

Lincoln and Guba (1985) advocated that to strengthen the trustworthiness of qualitative research, the research needs to be credible, transferable, dependable, and confirmable. These four concepts are adaptations of the traditional aspects of the quantitative categories of internal validity, external validity, reliability, and objectivity (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Scaife, 2004). Below I describe how I addressed credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability in my study.

Credibility

Credibility is reflective of the question, "Are the findings of the study a true representation of the data?" The credibility of a study is highly dependent upon how the research was conducted and the steps taken to ensure that the research findings represent the actual perspectives of the participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Sturman (1999) listed several strategies that can be used by the researcher to enhance the credibility of

case study research. Sturman's strategies suggested: (a) data-gathering procedures should be explained, (b) the researcher should use a diary or log to track what took place during various stages of the study, and (c) researcher biases should be acknowledged. As explained previously, I applied all of these components of credibility to my research.

Guba and Lincoln (1999) and Stake (2000) stated that prolonged engagement at a site also helps to overcome researcher biases and misconceptions. I collected my data over a period of seven months. In addition throughout my study, I reported on the challenges and processes of my research with my doctoral supervisor as a means of recognizing biases and recognizing potential themes.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) claimed that member check is the most crucial technique for establishing credibility. Member check is defined as a process "whereby data, analytic categories, interpretations, and conclusions are tested with members of those stakeholding groups from whom the data were originally collected" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 314). As mentioned above, after transcribing the interviews, the participants were provided with a copy of their transcript. They were asked to add, alter, and delete any information from the transcripts as they saw appropriate and acknowledge, through a signed Transcript Release Form (see Appendix H), that the transcript accurately reflected their intended meaning. A further aspect of member check included testing the researcher's interpretations of the data with the participants' intended meanings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To accomplish this end, along with each transcript, I included a written synopsis of my interpretations of categorical ideas that I believed transpired during the interview. Participants were provided with an opportunity to confirm, deny, and/or correct my interpretations. A final way in which I helped to ensure

credibility of the research was by including verbatim excerpts from the transcripts as a means to communicate my thematic research findings (Langenbach, Vaughn, & Aagaard, 1994).

Triangulation of data is another technique that supports research credibility (Creswell, 2005; Guba & Lincoln, 1999; Stake, 2005). Triangulation is accomplished when: (a) data is gathered from several sources, (b) data is gathered through several collection methods, (c) data is analyzed through multiple perceptions, and/or (d) the research is conducted by multiple investigators. Denzin (as cited in Lincoln & Guba, 1985) suggested the main modes for triangulation to include source, method, and investigator (p. 305), with source triangulation being the most popular of the three types (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Applied to my research, source triangulation was accomplished by collecting data from a variety of SCC members, teachers, and community members. Method triangulation was represented through the variety of data collection methods I incorporated into my study, namely, individual semi-structured interviews, observations at SCC meetings, and my reflective journal. Being the sole researcher of my study, investigator triangulation will not be incorporated into my research.

Transferability

Transferability refers to the extent to which the results of an original study can be applied to similar people, contexts, or settings (Ary, Chester-Jacobs, Razavieh, & Sorensen, 2006; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In case studies, transferability allows the *reader* the option of applying results to outside contexts. That is, the final judgment regarding the transferability of a case is vested in a third party—the person seeking to make the transfer (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Stake (2000) reminded researchers, “The purpose of a case report is not to represent the world, but to represent the case” (p. 448). Thus, generalizability of the results of a case study is basically impossible to apply to the general population because one person or small group of people does not necessarily represent the larger population.

In order for a reader to assess whether or not aspects of my study are transferable, in chapter 4 I provide background knowledge of the research setting and participants. As a part of my descriptions, I included circumstantial, social, and economic descriptors pertaining to the community, the school, and the SCC. To complement the transferability of my research, I maximized my sample variation to include participant diversity that represented differences of gender, profession, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status.

Dependability and Confirmability

The dependability of a study addresses the question, “Can the researcher be certain that the same results would occur again under the same circumstances?”

According to Guba and Lincoln (1999), dependability is strengthened through triangulation. Specifically, method triangulation undergirds claims surrounding the dependability of the research when multiple methods produce complementary results, and, as explained above, I applied method triangulation to my study.

Confirmability means the researcher is able to validate the research findings (Langenbach et al., 1994). Being able to produce an audit trail is the method used to demonstrate confirmability of results. An audit trail includes verification of such things as raw data, field notes, reflective notes, pilot forms, and transcripts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To augment the confirmability of my research, I compiled a database of notes, dates, communicative procedures, transcriptions, and other research documents that

traced the development of my research from its introductory stages, throughout the data collection, and to the final analysis stages (Yin, 2003). As well, an external auditor confirmed that the quotations used in the dissertation conformed to the narratives provided by participants (see Appendix I).

Ethical Considerations

Approval to conduct this research was granted on June 18, 2008 by the Behavioral Research Ethics Board at the University of Saskatchewan (see Appendix A). Consent to conduct this research was also obtained at the school division level. All participants involved were made aware of these preapproved guidelines. Participants were assured of their anonymity. In the writing of the document, I used pseudonyms in place of real names. Furthermore, I did not incorporate into the dissertation participant comments that potentially could identify the research site or participant identities.

Chapter Summary

Closely aligned with a constructivist orientation, a case study design was utilized to achieve my research purpose. In an effort to acquire a variety of perspectives, 17 participants from a bedroom community were involved in 35 semi-structured interviews. Observations collected during SCC meetings and a reflective journal provided supplementary data for this study. Data were analyzed by searching for dominant themes, which addressed the study's purpose and research questions. Member checks, source triangulation, method triangulation, utilization of actual quotes in the research finding, and an audit trail enforced the trustworthiness of this research. Within the next chapter, I present the thematic findings of my research.

CHAPTER 4: PRESENTATION OF DATA

I start this chapter with a review of the research purpose and questions. The remainder of the chapter is divided into five sections: (a) a description of the research site and setting, (b) thematic answer to research question #1, (c) thematic answer to research question #2, (d) thematic answer to research question #3, and (e) chapter summary.

To present the data and to assist in ensuring the credibility of this research, this chapter contains direct quotes that originated from either the participants' transcripts or my reflective journal. Every quote is followed by parenthesized information that relays transcript information. For example "(I2, p. 4, line 32)" means that the quote was taken from Interview #2, on page 4, line 32.

Reviewing the Research Purpose and Questions

The purpose of this study was to explore the role a school council played in encouraging community involvement in a K to 12 school located within a bedroom community. Three research questions guided the study:

1. In what perceived ways does the School Community Council influence community involvement in the school community?
2. In what perceived ways does community involvement benefit and challenge the school community?
3. How do social relationships influence the amount and type of community involvement that is reflected within the school community?

A Description of the Research Site and Context

Creswell (2007) reminded case study researchers, “It is important, too, for the researcher to have contextual material available to describe the setting for the case” (p. 95). The following is a description of the greater community of Sunshine, Sunshine School, Sunshine’s SCC, and the research participants of this study.

Sunshine’s Greater Community

According to the definitions provided in chapter 1, Sunshine is a bedroom community because the majority of its populace commuted to one of Saskatchewan’s eight urban centers. At the time of this study, the town of Sunshine had a population of fewer than 400 people. Typical of a Saskatchewan rural community of its size, Sunshine provided a variety of public facilities and volunteer opportunities for its citizenry. Within Sunshine, there was a town office, a church, a baseball diamond, a campground, a community hall, a postal outlet, a curling rink, and a skating rink. Volunteer clubs and organizations included church groups, a fire department, a recreational association, a dance association, and a preschool cooperative. Although the greater community of Sunshine was one of the fastest growing rural municipalities within Saskatchewan (Saskbiz, 2009), ironically, census data gathered between 2001 and 2006 indicated a slight decline in Sunshine’s population (Statistics Canada, 2009a).

At the time of my study, within and around the community of Sunshine, I witnessed a spate of industrial and residential building and planning such as surveying and land clearance. Such economic prosperities signified strong prospects for a future influx of new members to the community. Sunshine was located near a major highway heavily utilized by local commuters traveling to and from the city. The highway was also

important for the trucking industry that provincially and nationally transported a vast selection of natural resources and consumer supplies. Another channel of transportation proximal to Sunshine was the Canadian Pacific (CP) railroad. CP trains passed through Sunshine on a daily basis, making recurrent stops to load and deliver cargo at nearby businesses.

Agriculture and its related businesses was the predominant sector of employment for Sunshine's community members. Local businesses representing auto repairs, grocery stores, barbers/beauticians, restaurants, hotels/motels, and building maintenance were sources of employment for some community members. Several mines were located near Sunshine; thus, the mining sector also provided jobs for community members.

Ethnic and socioeconomic data supplied by Statistics Canada (2009a) indicated that people within the greater community of Sunshine were predominantly White, middle-class citizens. Approximately 95% of the greater population of Sunshine was Caucasian, about 5% was Aboriginal, and there were no declared visible minorities³. Ninety-seven percent of the population within Sunshine's greater community identified English as the predominant language spoken within the home. The median earnings for persons 15 years and over living within the greater community of Sunshine was approximately \$26,000 as compared to \$23,755, the median earnings for Saskatchewan citizens 15 years and older. Thus, the general populace of Sunshine enjoyed a slightly higher salary as compared to the average Saskatchewan person. As indicated within chapter 2, the median age of citizens living within Saskatchewan's bedroom communities was 34. Thus, the typical citizen living in the greater community of Sunshine was a

³ As defined by Statistics Canada (2009b), a visible minority is any person (other than Aboriginal peoples) who are not Caucasian in race or who are not white in color (§ 1).

White, English-speaking, middle to upper middle class individual, in the mid-30 age range.

Sunshine School

Sunshine School, with a population under 500 students, was a warm and welcoming place. Stepping into this K to 12 school, I instantly noticed a variety of posters, signs, and paintings reflecting a school-wide theme of respect: respect for self, respect for others, and respect for property. While walking the hallways, my attention was drawn toward the walls, which were adorned with plaques in celebration of the academic successes of students and school alumni. Adding to the collegial atmosphere, large sports trophies were encased behind shiny glass, and colorful, recently-painted student murals decorated entire walls. My initial positive impression of the school environment was later supported by a number of participants who commented that Sunshine was renowned for student achievement, particularly in the areas of academics, sports, drama, and music.

Sunshine School employed about 35 staff members, most of whom did not live in the school community. During the time of my study, I visited Sunshine school many times, talked with the principal and other staff members, provided an *In Motion*⁴ three-day in-service for grades 1-6 students, and conducted some individual interviews at the school. During my visits to the school, I found the students and staff to be friendly and welcoming to parents, substitute teachers, interning teachers, and myself.

⁴ *In Motion* is a province-wide movement aimed at increasing the physical activities of Saskatchewan's citizenry (Saskatchewan *in motion*, 2006).

Sunshine's SCC

Sunshine's SCC became an advisory body for Sunshine School in the fall of 2006, and, during the time of my study, this advisory council had been active for almost two years. Sunshine's SCC had seven representative parent and community members elected by the school community. For the most part, these elected members were middle-aged, White females, professionally employed outside the home. Participants informed me that these SCC members did not personally know each other before assuming their SCC positions. Additionally, Sunshine's SCC had five permanent members representing the school administration, teachers, and high school students. Sunshine's SCC included one appointed member who represented a local association. All SCC representatives and the appointed member had children attending Sunshine School. Although the SCC policy welcomes First Nations representation on every SCC (regardless of Aboriginal student representation within the school) (Endsin & Melvin, n.d.), Sunshine's SCC did not have an Aboriginal representative within its association.⁵ In total, during the time of my study, 13 elected, appointed, and permanent members made up Sunshine's SCC.

As recognized by the SCC policy, elected SCC members are to assume a two-year position (Endsin & Melvin, n.d.). With that stated, the SCC policy was legislated in 2006, and, at that time, the policy included a preliminary clause maintaining that a one-year position be established for half of the SCC members during the SCC's initial year of existence. Consequently, the school community annually held SCC elections for half of the elected positions. Any SCC member who finished a term could run for re-election.

⁵ The lack of First Nations representation may have been because only four students in the Sunshine School self-identified as Aboriginal.

Although Sunshine's SCC was about two years old, about one-third of the representative members were newly elected to the SCC a few months preceding the start of this study. As outlined in chapter 1, the purposes of the SCC are to: (a) develop a shared responsibility for the learning and wellbeing of students, and (b) encourage and facilitate parent and community input into school planning and improvement. SCC members scheduled eight SCC meetings for the school year. The specific meeting dates were accessible through the regularly updated school website.

The leadership of Sunshine's SCC appeared strong. The chairperson arrived well in advance of each meeting's start time. In preparation for the meeting, the chairperson set up/distributed such things as tables, chairs, a poster stand/paper, and chilled water bottles. Agendas and handouts were pre-stacked (in order) on the table in front of each empty chair. Each meeting agenda outlined a number of topics and approximate times dedicated to each topic. Meetings started punctually. The chairperson facilitated discussion and ensured that discussants remained on topic. By the end of each meeting, many members left with a target to achieve on or before subsequent meetings.

Throughout the remainder of this chapter, I present an analysis of primary data – individual interviews with SCC members, teachers, and community members. In addition to these data, I collected additional information by attending three SCC meetings and writing in a personal journal after each individual interview. These personalized data are also incorporated into the following sections and provide complementary information pertaining to the impact the SCC had on community involvement in the school.

The SCC's Influence on Community Involvement in School

In the following subsections, I explain how the SCC influenced community involvement by presenting data collected from three groups of participants: SCC members, teachers, and community members. As well, I include my personal collection of data based on information documented during SCC meetings and from my reflective journal. The predominant theme surfacing from the data was that the SCC's influence on community involvement in school was evolving.

Perceptions of SCC Members (April, Ella, Lilly, Lynn, & Zoe)

SCC members expressed varied opinions about the impact the SCC had on community involvement in school. On one hand, they described a number of SCC achievements and were confident about the SCC's ability to influence future community involvement. On the other hand, SCC members talked about how the newness of the SCC challenged their ability to influence community involvement in school.

SCC Accomplishments, Influence, and Future Potential. SCC members described what they believed to be their achievements pertaining to community involvement. Zoe stated that efforts to make community members more knowledgeable about the existence of the SCC were vital first steps toward the promotion of community involvement. "We combined it [meeting the SCC] with Meet the Teacher Night. We introduced all the teachers [and said] 'This is the SCC'" (I1, p. 14, line 40). Lilly believed educating parents about school programs was an example how the SCC influenced community involvement. She explained that the SCC sponsored a speaker who informed parents about novel math concepts utilized within the school's elementary math program. "The parents work through example problems so they ... know how their

children are being taught in those grades. Parents ... learn what it [the program] means and what it looks like, so they can actually help their kids with homework” (I2, p. 8, line 14). Ella talked about a community focus group meeting conducted by the SCC. For this event, the SCC saw school-community relationships as reciprocal in nature. More specifically, the SCC invited representative community members to identify the strengths and challenges of the school community. With regard to this community focus group, Ella said, “You know when we had that focus group meeting last year, we got so many good ideas from the community members” (I1, p. 15, line 22). In these comments, the SCC’s influence on community involvement in school was exemplified through school events sponsored by the SCC.

Other observations by SCC participants suggested that the SCC had a more subtle influence on community involvement in school. SCC members described the SCC as a medium for improving school-community relationships. Ella noted that the very existence of the SCC promoted stronger parent-teacher relationships, which, in turn, had a positive influence on community involvement. She commented, “I think in some ways it [the SCC] has facilitated better relationships between the staff and/or the parents who are on the Council, which then filters down on through into the community” (I2, p. 5, line 22). April believed the SCC’s influence was exemplified when community members approached SCC members with personal questions, concerns, and/or comments. “There are parents who do approach the Chair and the Vice-chair and other members who have been on for the full term already. And they talk about all kinds of issues” (I1, p. 10, line 33). SCC participants believed that relationships between SCC members and between SCC members and other people not on the SCC also helped the SCC influence

community involvement in school. Ella provided examples about how such contacts helped the SCC promote community involvement in school when she said:

I think our contacts definitely help in accomplishing things. For example, [a SCC member] has wonderful contacts to do this letterhead stuff and the logo stuff. So that is great. [Another SCC member], for example, is well-versed on how boards work. So that has helped. We've benefited from [another SCC member's] participation in the construction business. So all of us have something to offer. [Another SCC member has] some contacts in the world of psychology and counseling and can suggest speakers or whatever. So we all have contacts, and through those contacts we bring aspects that are helpful to the Council. (I2, p. 1, line 18)

Lynn believed the SCC was a web of people. She explained the physical presence of the SCC members at meetings represented a larger, albeit subtle, aspect of community involvement:

The Council is really is a web of people. We are not just singular there. We bring all of the contacts and experiences that we have with us to meetings. We are able to make more decisions based on the contacts in our social lives. (I2, p. 5, line 23)

Not only did SCC members describe how they were encouraging community involvement in Sunshine School through both concrete and subtle means, SCC members talked about their future aspirations to continue to promote community involvement.

Lilly emphasized the importance of SCC visibility. She stated, "I think we have to start to make ourselves extremely visible at every function. Have someone at all the activities. Whether it is at the drama club function, whether it's the Christmas Concert or whatever" (I2, p. 11, line 23). Lilly continued by providing a description of the SCC's future plans. She said, "We are going to start sub-committees. We are going to have a member on the sub-committee who will know what is going on. He or she will make sure everything is appropriate and get back to the Council" (I2, p. 5, line 27). Ella described additional aspects of the SCC future when she said:

That is one of the things we wanted to do on our Council, too. It's still one of those "in-progress" goals, which is to create a list of resources within our community—a list of people who can come in and talk and a list of places of interests within our community. (I2, p. 5, line 9)

April also emphasized the importance of visibility, and she was excited about the prospects of the SCC. She said, "This term is going to be the first term where [we] are really actively involved and going forward and making a difference. I think it is just in the very beginning stages of that" (I2, p. 12, line 43). Lynn believed that the SCC's future potential to influence community involvement largely lay in socializing with families who live in the school community:

My currency for the school is social networking with that family ... if we personally invite her, she will probably come with us. So I think we [the SCC] do have to sell ourselves, and we have so much to offer. (I1, p. 15, line 43)

Zoe enthusiastically explained, "I'm very confident that we will get a lot accomplished. Everyone is in it for the right reasons. Everyone wants to get things done" (I2, p. 8, line 3). Such comments reflected the optimism SCC members had toward increasing community involvement in the school.

SCC Newness Challenged Community Involvement. Although SCC participants appeared excited about their past accomplishments and optimistic about their future potential, participants indicated that the newness of the SCC policy was a significant challenge to their ability to promote community involvement in school. SCC participants explained that their organization was in its initial stages of development and growth, a process which involved a steep learning curve. April indicated, "The first term of the School Community Council was set upon learning who [we] were, what [our] mandate was, and how to go about doing that" (I2, p. 2, line 41). Lilly believed that as a group the SCC had not yet secured a collective identity. She said, "We already talked about the

fact that as a Council we don't really feel we are a cohesive group yet" (I2, p. 10, line 29). Ella and Lilly identified SCC training as an element of the SCC's development. Ella said, "It would have been good if we all had training on how to be on a board ... I think that would have been the most valuable at the beginning—things about motions and quorums" (I1, p. 14, line 44). Lilly noted, "I think a course on how to motivate people would be a good one, because basically, that is what we [the SCC] are there to do" (I1, p. 10, line 18). Some participants indicated that building a SCC identity was not a straightforward, one-time process. Zoe, who had been on the SCC for two years, explained that during the SCC's first year of existence, members naturally faced challenges associated with forming and securing an identity. During the SCC's second year, the new members who joined also faced these same challenges. Zoe noted:

So at that point, we said, "Okay, we have so many new members, we need a training session." We have members who might not realize our core focus. So that was a step backwards. So when we had a new member start, we were set off kilter a bit. (I2, p. 7, line 44)

An underlying message within Zoe's statement is that accompanying an influx of new members, the SCC faced the obstacle of having to redevelop its identity and re-affirm its goals and purpose.

Some SCC members attributed the impact the SCC had upon community involvement to the incorrect assumptions SCC members had regarding their purpose and responsibilities. Zoe believed that some community members joined the SCC under the misguided assumption that it served similar purposes to past educational boards. She said, "They looked at the Local Board and the School Community Council. They are not the same thing at all. But a lot of members got on that Council thinking that [the Local Board] was what it [the SCC] was" (I2, p. 7, line 41). When referring to the SCC's

financial accountability, April compared the SCC with past Parent Teacher Association standards, thus attributing characteristics of the PTA to the SCC. “In the old PTA, the funds may have been kept at the school” (I1, p. 14, line 15). Lynn, who was new to the SCC, was neither confident nor clear about the purpose of the SCC, but she seemed to understand the community engagement aspect of the role. She said, “I think, if I am not mistaken, that the SCC is responsible for engaging community and parents in educating our kids in school” (I1, p. 14, line 15). In a similar vein, Lynn also stated, “At the meetings, I mostly listen, because I don’t want to lead something that I don’t know anything about. All I can do is support until I have an idea about things and a firmer grasp on things” (I2, p. 2, line 1). When I asked Ella to articulate what she believed to be the role of the SCC, she said: “I’m not sure yet, honest to God. I thought I knew when I started, but as time has gone on, I think we have been redefining our role” (I1, p. 9, line 2). An element of confusion among some SCC members was that their purpose and responsibilities appeared to negatively influence their ability to influence community involvement in school.

Many SCC members believed that their ability to influence community involvement in school was also dependent upon better SCC communication with the school community. Lilly noted, “One of the problems we are facing as well is that community members, by and large, really don’t know what we do, what we are allowed to do, or even who we are” (I2, p. 10, line 33). April also identified communication with the school community as a barrier to the SCC’s influence in the school community:

I think it comes back, once again, to the communication block, especially for our community. For the School Community Council to impact the community, we need to bridge that communication gap and get the community involved in

whatever it is, whatever the goals are, whatever the activities are. (I2, p. 3, line 42)

Lilly provided a simple example of what improvements in SCC communication might look like. “We are going to create badges in order to prevent misunderstanding as to who is approaching them. When we are on Council business, we are going to wear these badges” (I2, p. 10, line 44). Lynn ardently supported the idea that an SCC presence needed to be more widely communicated across the school community, and she had set ideas of what this endeavor should look like:

I think we could have a communications officer in each area so that you can hand out flyers to families, homes, and businesses that don’t have a personal interest in the school. I also think we need to do more advertising and promoting of what we are doing—to communicate our endeavors and successes in newspapers like [name of local newspaper]. (I1, p. 14, line 7)

Such comments indicated that SCC members acknowledged the critical importance of communication as a vehicle for promoting community involvement while also signaling their perceptions that their communication with the school community was in need of improvement.

Although SCC participants verbalized a number of ways in which the SCC influenced community involvement in the school, when I asked the SCC participants if they believed the SCC changed the school, several participants indicated that the SCC had not changed the school. Zoe said, “I can’t say that there have been any changes” (I2, p. 12, line 40). Ella indicated, “You know, unfortunately, I don’t think the SCC has changed the school in any way very much” (I2, p. 5, line 27). April said, “At the moment, I would say that the school has not changed due to the presence of the School Community Council, only because it is so new” (I2, p. 12, line 40). When I asked Lilly how the SCC had affected the school, her point not only mirrored the above messages,

but her response provided insight as to why the SCC's influence was perceived by some SCC members to be lacking. "My succinct answer to that is, not at all, yet. Up to this point, we were always in a position where we couldn't be proactive. Everything we did was reactive up to this point, trying to catch up" (I2, p. 7, line 38). According to SCC members, it took time to comprehend the SCC policy and its mandate, and this point affected their ability to influence community involvement in the school.

Perceptions of Teachers (Janelle, Meagan, & Tanya)

Just as with the SCC members, the teachers had varied opinions about the influence the SCC had on community involvement in school. Even though teachers were able to articulate SCC achievements and were confident about the future of the SCC, some teacher participants believed that the SCC was not a widely-known entity among most teachers at Sunshine School.

SCC Accomplishments, Influence, and Future Potential. Janelle, Meagan, and Tanya provided relevant information related to the SCC's influence on community involvement in the school. Janelle was extremely complimentary of an oral address that an SCC member provided during the Remembrance Day Ceremony. Janelle was also knowledgeable about the community focus group that the SCC conducted. She said:

One of the best things that they [the SCC] did, and maybe some of the SCC members have told you, is they invited people from the different surrounding areas of the community to a focus group to talk about the needs of the community. (I1, p. 12, line 23)

Meagan commented on a school-wide art activity sponsored by the SCC in which the SCC distributed a prize for the top student achiever. Meagan also knew that the SCC was responsible for some recent construction done within the school community. Tanya indicated, "There is a website about our SCC" (I1, p. 10, line 18). Tanya also knew that

the SCC supported a guest speaker to talk to parents about the school's new math program. "They [the SCC] were involved with supporting the math night. Some parents came out for that, and more of that would be fantastic" (I1, p. 12, line 8). Thus, teachers were aware of a number of SCC accomplishments and SCC-sponsored events.

Similar to comments of SCC members, the teachers believed that the SCC had the potential to have a greater influence on the school in the future. Tanya welcomed the SCC to staff meetings:

I'm thinking that it might be handy to have a member of the School Community Council come to a staff meeting once in a while. Fill us in and update us. Let us know how they are connected to the school and what they are doing. Tell the staff how we can support them more. Maybe there is a member who can come into our class. Maybe someone on the Council has a skill to share with us. (I1, p. 10, line 21)

Tanya went on to explain that she would like the SCC to be a curricular resource for her classroom:

Promote supports for our teaching. Even to have the School Community Council come into our classroom. Maybe they could do some reading. Maybe they could come into our library and sponsor or know of people who could come in and do a little program. Maybe they know of people who have some expertise in some area and could come into the school. Or maybe they would know of someone who would want to volunteer. Maybe they know of some authors. (I2, p. 11, line 17)

Janelle had hopes that the SCC could support the school in the form of organizing guest speakers. "Maybe they could really get in a fantastic speaker for high school, or for a huge rally of some type, or something about bullying" (I1, p. 15, line 44). Meagan spoke about the potential the SCC had to influence parent involvement in school. "A lot of the SCC members are parents, so they talk to other parents and get them involved in the school. So that is the way the SCC impacts the school, through increasing parental involvement" (I2, p. 5, line 38). Just like SCC members, teachers were positive about

future SCC endeavors. As Janelle said, “There are lots of plans. There are many dreams. There are lots of positives” (I1, p 12, line 23).

Teachers’ Lack of Understanding about the SCC. Although teacher participants provided some examples of how the SCC influenced community involvement, their comments also highlighted a belief that, in general, the staff had limited knowledge about the SCC or its influence on community involvement. Teacher participants believed that, for the most part, Sunshine’s teachers did not understand the responsibilities and purpose of the SCC. As well, two of the three teachers interviewed did not appear to have a firm concept of what this new advisory body was. On this topic Janelle stated, “Now frankly, I think most staff members say, ‘Well, what is that SCC anyway?’” (I2, p. 6, line 13). Meagan’s understanding of the SCC was that “They connect the school to the community, somehow, someway” (I1, p. 9, line 41) and “I think it has a lot to do with financial stuff” (I1, p. 9, line 28). Meagan knew what the SCC acronym stood for but confessed, “Ya, I don’t know what they are about or what they are supposed to do” (I2, p. 13, line 13). Similar to SCC members, Tanya was confused about the SCC’s responsibilities. Tanya erroneously assumed the SCC’s responsibilities included fundraising for the school. “Maybe we might want some fundraising or some money for a new playground or something big down the road” (I1, p. 11, line 8). Thus, knowledge about what the SCC was and the impact it had on community involvement was still evolving for these teachers.

As with SCC members, I asked the teachers their views on how the SCC influenced the school environment. Meagan stated, “We know the SCC exists, but it is never something that we think of involving in our everyday classroom events” (I2, p. 8,

line 33). Tanya indicated that the SCC did not have a noticeable effect within the school. “We still have parents coming in and doing things like volunteering for the hot dog stuff. No, it [the school] hasn’t changed, not that I’ve noticed” (I2, p. 11, line 22). Janelle stated, “Now, are they [the SCC] very effective? Really, when we are talking about how they affect the day-to-day operations in my classroom, no they don’t affect that. They are not effective in that way” (I1, p. 12, line 42). Although these teachers could articulate examples of an SCC presence within the school, they found it challenging to explain how the SCC had affected them on a professional level.

Perceptions of Community Members (Alice, Amy, Brittany, Cory, Crystal, Kate, Mark, Ricky, & Tabitha)

Of the nine community members I interviewed, only two participants had knowledge of the existence of the SCC. Only one participant could identify the name of a person who assumed an SCC position. For the most part, community members did not know whom they could contact (beside the principal) if they wanted to communicate with the SCC. Alice indicated, “And I don’t know who is on the Council. Are they rural people?” (I1, p. 11, line 41). Additional comments from community members with regard to knowledge about the SCC included: “I don’t really know what they are all about or what goes on with them” (Ricky, I1, p. 10, line 9), “I really don’t have an understanding of the role of that Council” (Cory, I2, p. 1, line 10), and “I’ve never heard of it in my life—never” (Crystal, I1, p. 12, line 24). Tabitha added, “I don’t even think they’ve made their existence known to other community members” (I1, p. 7, line 25). Community members were uncertain about SCC meeting dates, topics discussed during meetings, and/or the general intention of the SCC. Just as was the case with teachers in

Sunshine School, comments of community members highlighted that the SCC was not a well-known entity within the community.

Many participants verbalized their beliefs that a big part of influencing community involvement in the school centered on successful communication with the community. Kate said, “The verbal communication is the way to go, there is no doubt about that; however, trying to keep everyone in the community in the knowledge loop is really tough” (I2, p. 8, line 38). When I asked Alice to provide personal advice for the SCC, she said, “Contact us. Let us know who you are and what you are doing. Send us invitations to the school events and to the meetings of the Council” (I1, p. 11, line 27). Mark, a community member who had no children attending the school, explained he had never been contacted by the SCC. He went on to say, “We have not received anything from the school other than a tax bill once a year for me to support the school. So it’s only a one-way street” (I3, p. 5, line 17). All community members appeared to be interested in the SCC and wanted information about the SCC and its school-related activities. They commented that welcoming community members to the school was an important step to improving community involvement in school.

Consistent with comments from SCC members and teachers, community members had assumptions about what the SCC should be or do. As Mark and I talked about the SCC, through default, he thought the SCC had similar responsibilities as other school councils with which he had been involved. “We did other things than fundraising; we built a large game-set outside. Our Association built it ourselves in the playground” (I2, p. 1, line 42). Like Mark, Cory incorrectly assumed the SCC sponsored fundraising activities:

Or if this Community Council made an effort to contact some of the people who no longer have kids at school ... If there were a fundraiser, the type that we had when our kids were going to school, I would probably go or buy something. (I2, p. 5, line 1)

Crystal was under the assumption that the SCC largely assumed a nonacademic administrative role, and she explained what she thought the SCC should do:

Oh, and heat—heat is a really big issue in our school. It doesn't come on until November or December and we are freezing in there. The air conditioning—they turn it on in maybe July. Fix these things ... So they should do something about that. (I1, p. 19, line 15)

Crystal also believed the SCC was involved in putting in a new stop sign by the school.

With regard to SCC assumptions, Alice provided another idea to consider:

Maybe some people think that a group, like the School Community Council, is an elite group, and the rest of us aren't allowed in there. Now, I am not saying that that is happening, but I can see that people might think that. (I2, p. 6, line 10)

In particular, Alice's comment brought to light the idea that community members may have preconceived notions about the roles and responsibilities of the SCC, notions that could discourage a greater community presence within the school.

No community member could provide examples of how Sunshine's SCC influenced community involvement in the school. Ricky concluded, "The way the organization used to be and how it is now. Things still get done now ... I'm not sure why they changed or when they did, but I haven't seen a difference" (I1, p. 15, line 33). Thus, although community members were interested in this new association, their comments reflected that the SCC, so far, only had, at best, a limited impact on community involvement in Sunshine School.

Augmented Data

As part of my data collection, I attended three SCC meetings. A review of the minutes of these meetings showed that a number of discussion topics directly pertained to

the SCC's effort to influence community involvement in school. The information in Table 2 highlights some of the SCC's community involvement discussion foci. During these three meetings, the SCC dedicated about half of its time and attention to discussing ways in which it could support community involvement in school; the other half of the time was spent on discussing school and SCC administrative issues (e.g., approving past minutes and presenting principal, student, and budget reports). For a sample of the minutes of an SCC meeting, all of which were uploaded to the school's public website, see Appendix J.

Table 2

Community Involvement Topics at Three SCC Meetings

SCC Meeting	SCC Discussions Focused on Community Involvement
November Meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organizing parent workshop on math constructivism • Creating reading comprehension strategies online video for parents • Discussing student engagement and aligning it with increasing parent involvement in school • Forming ideas for a family fun night at the school • Distributing a school effectiveness survey to parents
January Meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing an SCC excerpt in the next school newsletter with regard to SCC logo • Organizing parent workshop on math constructivism • Discussing results of the school effectiveness survey to parents • Creating reading comprehension strategies online video for parents
February Meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reissuing school effectiveness survey to parents • Celebrating success of the parent workshop on math constructivism • Augmenting SCC efforts to welcome community members at the fall Meet the Teacher Night

My personal journal data reinforced the point that SCC members were highly motivated to influence community involvement in the school. After my interviews with some SCC members, I described them in the following manner:

She is dedicated to making the SCC an effective body. (Journal, p. 1, line 20)

She is all about doing a good job representing the voice of the community through her membership on the SCC; she's an advocate for her community. She's extremely positive, and she wants the community to have more of a presence within the school. (Journal, p. 22, line 7)

All of these SCC members are very serious about their job and want to influence community involvement in the school. Their hearts and ambitions for their community are big. (Journal, p. 62, line 21)

After interviewing a number of teachers and community members, I indicated that participants did not appear to be knowledgeable about the SCC and its influence on community involvement in school. At the end of one such interview, I wrote, "It was interesting that [name of community member] really didn't know what the School Community Council is or is suppose to do" (Journal, p. 12, line 1). I also indicated that teachers and community members had a positive attitude pertaining to the potential the SCC had to influence community involvement in school:

I am finding again and again, as I interview teachers and community members that their knowledge about the SCC and its impact appears to be limited. With that said, although participants haven't seen a big SCC presence, they seem excited about the SCC's potential to bring the community into the school and vice-versa. (Journal, p. 53, line 2)

My journal also highlighted that SCC communication with the school community was an area in which the school and the SCC needed to improve. For example, after one of my visits to the school I wrote, "I saw no display or informative presence of the SCC and its members within the school. I believe such information is as relevant as pictures

of the staff and high school football achievements” (Journal, p. 45, line 15). After interviewing one particular community member, I wrote:

He was on the old School Board many years ago. It was obvious that he knew what he was talking about when it came to administrative aspects of the school. He was very involved within the community. And, yet, he knew nothing about the new School Community Council. I think my interviews with him were the first times he had ever heard of its existence. Once again, this interview illustrated how communication is a key challenge for SCCs. (Journal, p. 38, line 22)

After interviewing an SCC member, I indicated:

A major theme that is arising from the majority of interviews is how difficult it is to involve the community with its diverse interests, needs, and locations. [Her] interview supported this theme. She believes there needs to be a communication liaison officer in various areas of the community. These individuals could help disseminate school information into the community. (Journal, p. 42, line 16)

In my view, the SCC had good intentions to impact on influencing community involvement in the school, and community members supported the idea that the SCC was an effective medium for impacting community involvement in school. My notes also highlighted that during my data collection, I believed that improvement to SCC-school community communication was one way to assist the SCC in attaining this goal.

Summary

At the time of this research, the SCC’s influence on community involvement appeared to be still evolving. Participants described a number of SCC accomplishments pertaining to community involvement in school and perceived that the SCC will have a growing impact on community involvement in the future. Due to the newness of the SCC, many participants identified a number of challenges that the SCC faced as it tried to promote community involvement in school. These challenges included SCC members understanding their purpose and responsibility, the SCC’s visibility within the school community, and the SCC’s ability to communicate with the school community.

In the following section, I address my second research question by presenting data, which answers the question: in what perceived ways does community involvement benefit and challenge the school community?

Benefits and Challenges of Community Involvement in School

Participants recognized community involvement as both a benefit and a challenge for the school community. The thematic finding regarding how community involvement benefited the school community was that traditional forms of community involvement in school improved the social cohesion of the community. More specifically, some participants believed traditional forms of community involvement in school improved parent-to-parent relationships, improved school-home relationships, provided additional support for school curricula, and improved student performance in school.

Most participants identified the main challenge to community involvement in school as the misalignment of SCC policy with participant beliefs surrounding traditional forms of community involvement in school. All SCC members indicated that fulfilling the mandate of the SCC policy was their focus. As a result, some SCC members believed they could not influence community involvement in ways they deemed as important. Teachers believed the SCC should only be involved in peripheral aspects of the school, and many community members perceived that meeting the specialized needs of the entire school community was, in reality, a challenging aspect of community involvement in school.

Benefit of Community Involvement: Improving the Social Cohesion of the Community

Unique sets of ideas from the three groups of participants (SCC members, teachers, and community members) did not surface as they talked about beneficial

community involvement in school. For this reason, the perceptions of SCC members, teachers, and community members are amalgamated into one voice for this section.

When I asked participants what they perceived to be the benefits of community involvement in school, the vast majority of participants initially responded by providing examples of community involvement, which they deemed worthwhile. Cory depicted fundraising as an important activity. “For a while, we used to have auction sales within the community for school events. Some of the high school kids used to go off on trips ... There was fundraising for these events. They were good things” (I1, p. 13, line 6). On the topic of fundraising, Tanya added that some community members were most comfortable supporting the school through fundraising. As Tanya said, “Some parents just want that type of community involvement [fundraising]. They don’t want any more than that. It’s something they can do” (I1, p. 14, line 37). Ricky recognized that having a community bobcat driver, carpenter, or electrician volunteer to support school projects is an integrated aspect of community involvement. Lilly explained that community efforts were instrumental in the construction of a school concession stand. Cory and Tabitha also indicated that attendance at school-sponsored events was an important part of community involvement. They went on to describe what such involvement looked like. Cory said, “It [community involvement] looks like a crowded dark gym where there isn’t room to sit, so you stand in the back. You are watching both you and your neighbors’ kids there on stage at the Christmas Concert” (I1, p. 13, line 15). Tabitha indicated:

For me, it [community involvement] would be like when the school puts on a production, like a drama production, and when all of the community people come out to see it. They watch the production. They visit and have cake and dainties. (I1, p. 3, line 44)

Janelle also indicated that parent attendance at the school's sporting events was an important form of community involvement. She continued by explaining its potential:

You do see lots and lots of parents at these school sporting events. That is a way they get to know each other is that they travel with their kids and talk to each other during sporting events. They support their kids and along the way they socialize with other parents. (I1, p. 6, line 9)

Interestingly, in all of these examples, community involvement involved the social networking of community members in some form or another.

When further probing participants about why such forms of community involvement were beneficial to the school, two participants perceived community involvement in school was a conduit for getting community members to feel more welcome and comfortable in the school. Tabitha said, "It would be beneficial for the school to host activities so that people in the community know they are welcome to come to the school. Community members should be comfortable to come, especially seniors" (I1, p. 8, line 5). Tanya relayed a similar comment when she said, "Because it [community involvement in school] should make them feel invited and welcomed; it is making everyone feel they belong to the community. How can you have strong relationships, if you don't feel welcome and comfortable?" (I2, p. 3, line 13).

A number of participants believed that community involvement was associated with improved parental relationships, improved school-community relationships, and improved parent-teacher relationships. Crystal talked about what happened when her grandmother volunteered at her school. "She was very in tune with the school. She knew all the moms, and she was always there volunteering. She liked socializing with the other moms at school. They became her friends" (I1, p. 4, line 9). Alice perceived that community involvement in school enhanced teacher-parent relationships. "Community

involvement shows our interest in the school—we like to see what the teachers do and show the teachers we like what they are doing. It shows we are working together” (I1, p. 8, line 8). Tanya, a teacher, indicated:

As you start doing this community stuff, you realize how much more the kids—and community members—come to you. They trust you. They share things with you. They are more open with you. They are more willing to work with you. (I2, p. 14, line 3)

Janelle also indicated how parent and community involvement can serve as a positive role model for students. “I think there is also the other piece that when children see their parents coming into the school, whether it’s for drama or to watch the volleyball team, it shows the kids that parents think school is important” (I2, p. 5, line 1). In these comments, participants perceived community involvement to strengthen a variety of personal and professional social relationships within the school community.

Alice and Tabitha talked about how community involvement creates a sense of pride in one’s community. Alice indicated, “When members of the community attend school functions and are visible, they show the kids that they are proud of them” (I1, p. 8, line 7). Tabitha explained that pride assists in the formation of strong relationships, “So supporting activities in a small community and in the school are helpful and feed the pride of the community. This sense of pride makes people want to work together to accomplish things” (I2, p. 1, line 28). The community pride that these participants believed emanated from community involvement was another example of how community involvement possibly influenced the social cohesion of the community.

Tanya highlighted her belief that community involvement should produce reciprocal benefits for both the school and the community. Tanya indicated, “The school is part of the community, so why would you pay rent somewhere or have to go

somewhere else?” (I2, p. 3, line 6). Tanya continued on this thought by saying, “There needs to be reciprocity in community involvement. It’s not just what can they do for us? It’s also what can we [the school] do for them?” (I2, p. 3, line 21). Tanya had the experience of working in a community school. Reflecting on this experience, she provided examples of how the school-community connections benefited both parties:

We had an Elder in our school. We had community members working in the kitchen for our school program. We had community members running the clothing depot. We had a sitting room when community members could come in to read books and magazines ... Now, all of that filters back to the community helpers, too. They got some money. (I2, p. 9, line 12)

Tanya’s perceptions incorporated the idea that community involvement in school strengthened both the school and the individuals involved with community involvement.

Another point pertaining to the benefits of community involvement was articulated by Lilly. Lilly perceived that community involvement in school was associated with an overall improvement of student performance. She said:

Volunteers and getting community participation in school increases the educational opportunities for students. It increases the support for the children and the community at large. You are getting better adjusted kids. You are getting better educated kids. You are getting happy kids all the way around. You are getting less social problems. (I2, p. 6, line 30)

Also on the topic of community involvement in school, many participants believed that utilizing local guest speakers benefited the school in the form of curricula support. Participants explained that the school community was rich with citizens who had specialized talents and skills, and these guest speakers had great potential to augment teacher instruction. As Tabitha indicated:

But I would like to see a lot more of these parents who have careers come into the school and do talks. That is what I would like to see, especially within the older grades. The community is rich with people from all different types of careers. (I1, p. 9, line 23)

As an educator, Tanya was excited about how the SCC could support instruction within her classroom. Tanya suggested, “To promote local supports for our teaching ... Maybe they [the SCC] know of local people who have some expertise in a subject area and could come into the school” (I2, p. 11, line 20). Mark and Lilly provided similar comments. Mark stated, “So there are people who are in the area who could be utilized for the school’s focus” (I2, p. 6, line 2). Lilly said, “To start with ... create a list of human resources. What we could then do at that point is get that list of resources to teachers” (I1, p. 5, line 16). In all of these guest speaker examples, the social contact between the school and community members was increased. Thus, these comments served to support the idea that the social cohesion of the school community was positively affected by community involvement.

Challenges of Community Involvement: Misalignment of SCC Policy

In dealing with the challenges associated with community involvement in school, the voices of SCC members, teachers, and community members are presented in separate sections, because each group had somewhat unique opinions on the topic. In particular, as SCC members tried to activate community involvement in school, they felt restrained. They perceived the SCC policy, for the most part, was misaligned with the traditional perception of community involvement in school. Teachers believed the SCC should be involved in peripheral aspects of the school but not have a direct influence on their classroom curricula. Several community members perceived that meeting the specialized needs of the entire school community was a challenging component of community involvement.

Perceptions of SCC Members. SCC members voiced their concerns regarding the formalities of the SCC policy. In particular, Lilly described what she wanted and did not want to do as an SCC member. Lilly said:

We all want to be physically doing something. Right now, we all feel a little disillusioned as to what we are supposed to be doing. We don't feel like there is anything we can do. We are not politicians, nor feel like that is where we want to be placed. We don't want to play politics. We want to be raising funds and driving the school bus and doing those types of things. We feel a little bit ripped off. (I2, p. 4, line 18)

Lilly then explained that she believed the SCC policy actually prevented her from influencing grassroots community involvement in the school:

It's [the policy] so busy telling you, in such a very politically correct way, that you can do anything your community needs. Then we say, "We want to do this." We are told, "No, you can't do that because now that would affect 'x'." And, no, you can't raise funds because you are not supposed to be raising funds. No, you can't raise funds to start up the - let's say, the reading club or supplying the resources for the kids for something. You can't do that because you are not supposed to fundraise. They tied both hands behind our back and hobbled us. So what do they want us to do? I would have been better off staying by myself with the other parents supporting [a specific group] ... or I would have been better off, just walking up to the individual teachers and saying, "Give me something to do." (I2, p. 4, line 41)

Ella also described what she had anticipated from SCC membership prior to joining:

I think when a lot of us started on the Council we thought our contributions would be more welcomed, not just by the school because our contributions would be welcomed for the most part by the school, but by the division. I thought that we would be a contributing body. I thought that we would find ways to involve community participants in the school. I thought that would be one of our things - we would try to forge bridges between the broader community and the community of kids in the school. (I1, p. 9, line 11)

Just like Lilly and Ella, Lynn also expressed frustration with the mandate of the policy, and she believed fulfilling the policies' numerous requirements was almost unattainable for a volunteer group. Lynn indicated:

We are doing it [fulfilling the SCC policy] the way it is supposed to be done, and it can't be done well because they are asking too much. ... With our SCC, we

have the guidance from [our chair] to try and attack everything that we are supposed to cover. Unfortunately, there is neither the time nor the energy from the members. (I2, p. 15, line 30)

The above comments not only reflected the frustration of most the interviewed SCC members, but their comments also indicated that these SCC members believed that the policy's formal requirements were not in line with their ideal personal perceptions of community involvement in school. Several SCC members were frustrated that, the SCC policy did not include such traditional activities as core responsibilities of the SCC.

One of the formal requirements of the SCC was to assist in creating and support the school's *Learning Improvement Plan*. On this topic Zoe commented:

My understanding about their [the SCC's] role would clearly be to support the administrator, to meet their goals. The school division outlines three goals and the focus of the School Community Council is to do whatever they can to align the school division goals with the school goals. (I2, p. 1, line 9)

Some SCC members were concerned by the SCC's lack of influence in determining these local goals. Ella believed top-down directives prevented the SCC from doing what it really wanted to do, which was to promote community involvement under their own terms. As Ella indicated, "Because we have these big projects to do for the *Learning Improvement Plan*, much of the community stuff is actually falling by the wayside" (I1, p. 15, line 23). Lynn also believed that the school's *Learning Improvement Plan* was heavily influenced by centralized educational priorities. She made this point when she said, "The main goals are set by the people in the division's office. They are not set by us, and that makes them less personally relevant" (I1, p. 14, line 28). She continued with a suggestion: "I would like the SCCs to be given a little more latitude and respect to choose their own goals" (I1, p. 14, line 35). Ella also acknowledged that centralized authorities influenced what the SCC did. She noted, "They [the Ministry of Education

and the school division] tell you what you are allowed to support” (I1, p. 13, line 2). In this manner, some SCC members perceived that their SCC had little influence in creating decentralized, community-influenced goals.

Not only did the expectation to contribute to the *Learning Improvement Plan* appear to affect the SCC’s ability to support what they believed to be a more localized version of community involvement in school, SCC members regarded bureaucratic aspects of the SCC policy as a waste of time. Lynn explained, “But please don’t mandate my time with big “P” politics, like creating a constitution. Just give me the constitution. I don’t want to build it. That’s not why I joined” (I2, p. 14, line 6). Ella’s comments reflected a similar frustration when she said:

And another thing that is wasted in regards to time ... is that so much of our first two years was spent developing a Constitution and setting up this and that. And you know what? They all want the same damn thing anyway. (I1, p. 12, line 12)

In the following quote, Lilly explained how bureaucratic responsibilities stilted the SCC’s ability to promote community involvement:

So all this thing [the SCC policy] was supposed to do was to get the School Community Council to get the community more involved with the school. That’s one sentence. You did not have to legislate us to death and turn us into something we didn’t want to be. Just say, “Twenty years of research has said that if you have high community participation supporting a close school atmosphere, those kids are going to be way ahead.” Guess what, everyone could understand that. Then we wouldn’t have to have these rules like making a constitution - things that wasted our time. We just want to get to what we are supposed to be doing. (I2, p. 6, line 35)

Instead of the SCC policy being recognized as a conduit for increased community involvement in the school, several SCC participants perceived the SCC policy actually limited the SCC’s potential to influence community involvement in the school as they defined it.

A unique comment in relation to the requirements of the SCC policy came from another SCC member, April. For the most part, April did not display frustration with the policy and its formal requirements. When asked if she felt comfortable supporting the *Learning Improvement Plan*, April remarked, “Absolutely” (I1, p. 11, line 6). When talking about the SCC policy as depicted within the SCC handbook, April commented, “I found the handbook to be quite thorough; however, it wasn’t so restrictive that it didn’t give you the opportunity to do what was important in your community in your school” (I2, p. 3, line 16). As well, April believed that the school division’s tight authority within such domains as SCC finances was a good thing because, consequently, funds became more secure and administrative processes more transparent.

Perceptions of Teachers. Teachers’ perceptions overwhelmingly pointed to the idea that the SCC should simply be responsible for supporting traditional school programs and not be involved with determining academic goals and curricula. Teachers stated that the SCC should not affect their classroom dynamics. Janelle explained:

I really don’t think they [the SCC] should [affect my classroom]. That’s my classroom. I’m the professional, and I make professional decisions for the children. I would think that would be a real detriment and a real negative event if the SCC started to interfere with how we teach. (I1, p. 14, line 1)

Meagan’s statement was similar to Janelle’s:

You know, we are professionals, and we know what we are doing. We went to school for a long time. Some parents are not in the same area of work but have lots of opinions about how we should run things here. Sometimes that gets to be tough. (I1, p. 4, line 18)

Janelle recognized community involvement to be a form of parent involvement, and such involvement was already alive within Sunshine School, regardless of the SCC. Janelle said, “Community involvement is happening with or without an organized SCC. An SCC does promote parent involvement; however, there always has been community

involvement and support in schools before the creation of SCCs” (I2, p. 5, line 25). In summary, teachers appeared comfortable supporting the SCC when it promoted traditional forms of community involvement in school. On the other hand, teachers appeared uninterested in having the SCC’s influence extend into the curricular decisions within their classrooms.

Perceptions of Community Members. The notion that the SCC could and should influence school planning and improvement was not only a challenging concept for SCC members and teachers, but, for a number of reasons, the idea was either problematic or unrealistic for many community members, as well. Alice explained that it is difficult to meet the specialized interests of all parents, and problems arise when inviting a local voice to influence educational politics. She then articulated her disinterest with getting involved with the SCC and its formal responsibilities:

I tend to not like that whole politics of things. If I had a choice of going to this [an SCC meeting] and going to the Christmas concert or going to watch the little kids doing gymnastics, I would choose that [the latter]. (I1, p. 12, line 18)

When I asked Ricky if community involvement in school through a formal SCC presence was important, he remarked that the traditional forms of community involvement were more important to him:

As we talked about before, the Christmas pageant, the music festivals, the sports, and those sorts of things always bring in a lot of people from the community. Then for other things, you’ve got to let the school do its job... A person or a Council has to know when to do things and when to step back in other areas. (I2, p. 3, line 17)

Mark believed that when too many people are invited to make decisions, conflicts arise:

“Not all kinds of involvement finish up for the good. It can have unavoidable side effects” (I3, p. 2, line 1). Crystal (a recent Sunshine student) candidly indicated that community members did not need to become involved with the school in any way. She

said, “But the community doesn’t need to be involved because a lot of the students don’t even live there [in Sunshine] so what does it matter?” (I1, p. 15, line 30). Cory indicated his disbelief that the SCC could realistically have an influence on school academics.

Cory said:

First of all, I would be very surprised if this Community Council is able to actually influence the curriculum. Second of all, I would also be very surprised if the teachers would say, “Oh, ya, that’s a good thing that parents are getting involved and making decisions about curriculum.” (I2, p. 2, line 20)

Thus, many of the community members were hesitant about whether local community members should or could have an influence in academic school activities.

Community members also voiced their belief that the SCC organization would probably face a number of barriers as it tried to achieve its goals. Ricky, who had experience working on councils, identified time as a barrier for SCC accomplishments. “It is a long process to learn how things are done on councils and boards and things like that. It is, as you say, a learning curve for people, especially for those people beginning” (I1, p. 11, line 37). Kate’s ideas mirrored Ricky’s when she said:

I understand about that learning curve that is present on Councils. It takes time to learn what you can do, what you need to do, and how you should do it. Then there are hiccups all along the way that make you back up one step. (I2, p. 2, line 35)

Cory, who also had experience working on community boards, believed that bureaucracy would limit what the SCC would be able to do. To this point, Cory said: “I would like to see some more community involvement, but I think these Community Councils are likely to be met with a lot of bureaucratic brick walls” (I2, p. 2, line 42). In general, some community members predicted that it would take time for SCC members to learn their roles and that the bureaucratic responsibilities ensconced within the SCC policy could be a negative influence toward the proliferation of community involvement in the school.

Augmented Data

My attendance at three SCC meetings and my reflective journal provided augmented data with regard to information pertaining particularly to the challenges associated with promoting community involvement in school. To begin, during each of the three meetings I attended, I recognized that bureaucracy appeared to have an effect on the SCC's influence on community involvement in school. For example, during meetings, SCC members contributed a number of ideas about how to promote community involvement in the school; however, the SCC appeared to have their ambitions obstructed when it came to monetary support for their ideas. SCC members debated whether or not expenses related to their community involvement ideas (many of which were not directly in line with the *Learning Improvement Plan*) would be covered within the SCC budget. Within such discussions, some SCC members verbalized their annoyance and displayed their disapproval through body language. My paraphrased general statement that I often heard during each of the meetings was, "If the main purpose of the SCC is to promote student success and wellbeing, this community involvement idea should be covered under our budget." Hence, in line with what SCC members said during interviews, bureaucratic aspects of the SCC policy appeared to be frustrating for some SCC members during SCC meetings.

As an observer, one issue that surfaced in SCC interviews but did not appear to be present during SCC meetings pertained to support for the *Learning Improvement Plan*. Interestingly, when interviewed, most SCC participants expressed frustration with regard to being mandated to address the *Learning Improvement Plan*; however, for the most

part, SCC members did not overtly display frustration pertaining to the *Learning Improvement Plan* during SCC meetings.

Excerpts from my journal reinforced the idea that SCC members were challenged by the formal requirements of the SCC policy. For example, after interviewing three SCC members, I wrote:

It was obvious how much of a hindrance the School Community Council handbook was to [her], as she vehemently discussed her frustration with it. She saw the book as a straight jacket; something that almost prevented the very thing it was suppose to promote, that being community involvement. (Journal, p. 41, line 3)

Although very positive of the Council, she highlighted that bureaucracy slowed down the productivity of the Council, and, at times, prevented it from making a marked difference in her school community. (Journal, p. 61, line 11)

She doesn't want to be involved with the *Learning Improvement Plan*. She brought home the idea that teachers should be responsible for teaching and parents should be responsible for parenting. (Journal, p. 2, line 18)

As a part of my Journal reflections, I also noted how some teachers and community members believed the SCC should not be involved in influencing the school's academic programs. My reflective remark after one particular teacher interview indicated as such:

I am impressed the quality of [this teacher's] specialized knowledge. She is truly a well-trained professional, and she wants to provide quality content for her students. I understand why she is anxious to invite parents, who might have little knowledge about specialized subjects, to contribute to the curriculum discussion. (Journal, p. 50, line 8)

After interviewing a community member, I noted:

I found it interesting that [this community member] believed that the community should only be involved with the school to a certain extent. The idea has come up but yet again that the teachers should be allowed to teach, and parents and community members should only be involved when asked. (Journal, p. 13, line 13)

In summary, my attendance at SCC meetings and excerpts from my reflective journal reinforced the ideas previously articulated by participants during interviews. The bureaucratic aspects of the SCC policy were frustrating for many SCC members, and teacher and community members were hesitant or dubious about supporting a greater SCC influence on curricular aspects of education.

Summary

Participants identified traditional forms of community involvement in school as parents/community members attending school-sponsored events, volunteering at the school, donating to the school, and fundraising for the school. Many participants highlighted that an important part of community involvement was the utilization of local guest speakers to reinforce curricular content. Most participants believed that when community members supported traditional forms of community involvement in school, the school community became socially united. Some participants explained that the community involvement in school had a positive effect on the quality and quantity of parent-parent, parent-teacher, and school-community relationships. One participant believed community involvement in school had reciprocal benefits for both the school and the individuals involved. One participant also perceived that community involvement in school supported student achievement.

When referring to challenges of community involvement in school, most SCC participants identified the SCC policy itself as the primary challenge. Most SCC members recognized the bureaucratic aspects of the policy to be time-consuming and nonproductive. Most SCC participants believed the SCC policy prioritized community involvement within the boundaries of centralized school improvement initiatives, without

promoting community involvement as participants traditionally defined it. Teachers believed that the SCC's influence should be limited to traditional support for school events, and should not extend into influencing the curricular decisions of their classrooms. Some community members questioned if there was a need for community members to have a formal voice in influencing academic school decisions. One community member was highly skeptical that the SCC could realistically have a influence on school decisions. Some community members believed the SCC would probably be faced with bureaucracy that would limit its ability to influence community involvement in school.

Social Relationships Impact Community Involvement

My third research question was: how do social relationships influence the amount and type of community involvement that is reflected within the school community? The major theme surfacing from the data was that social relationships were precursors of community involvement. In the following section, this theme is threaded through two dominant subsections: (a) explanation of the participants' philosophy of community and the importance of social relationships and (b) a description of social relationships in Sunshine's bedroom community. When presenting data pertaining to this research question, I amalgamated the voices of SCC members, teachers, and community members because, for this research question, a distinctive voice did not resonate within any one particular group.

Participants' Philosophy of Community: The Importance of Social Relationships

In an effort to explain how strong communal relationships are precursors to active community involvement, I divided this section into two subsections. As participants

talked about the importance of social relationships, many participants first presented their philosophical explanations of community, which included concepts of interdependency, attitude, and reciprocity. Then participants also articulated that children and sports were fundamental aspects of social relationships in their community.

Interdependency, Attitude, and Reciprocity. Participants' definitions and descriptions of community highlighted that secure, interdependent relationships are a vital component of strong communities. For example, Lilly defined community as, "A group of people who are ... co-dependent on each other for social and physical security" (I1, p. 1, line 5). Cory stated, "There is an interdependency in tight communities" (I1, p. 14, line 30). When visiting a Hutterite colony, Ricky was impressed by the interdependent responsibilities of its members. He described how the jobs of each individual related to the overall strength of the entire community:

They [Hutterites] were self-sustaining. They had everything from vegetables to animals to a butcher shop. They had a school right there in the colony. As I said, everyone had something to do. The young and the old all had their duties for the day. Everyone pitched in and did what they were supposed to. It was quite impressive to see that sort of community. (I2, p. 1, line 9)

When describing characteristics of strong communities, Mark reflected on his knowledge of ancient Roman civilization and highlighted the importance of promoting social relationships through recreation. "The Roman leisure time was quite a big part of their society ... There were communal activities such as theatre, street theatre, circuses ... So this type of activity was very deeply rooted in their social functioning" (I3, p. 2, line 9). Many participants acknowledge that, in one form or another, strong communities had a multitude of social and professional interdependent relationships, and thriving communities were those who utilized the talents and skills of its populace.

Some participants stressed the idea that social relationships evolve from a citizenry that possesses a caring attitude for fellow neighbors. Meagan said, “I think a true community really cares about its members and all the people involved” (I1, p. 3, line 4). Ella also believed a community’s strength is linked to the attitude of its citizenry. She indicated that in order for a community to be strong, the people making up that community have to assume a collective role in strengthening the welfare of a community: “First of all, to make a strong community, I think there has to be a willingness from people to be a community—to step out and extend a hand to someone else” (I1, p. 4, line 4). Kate provided examples of how a positive, nurturing communal attitude is embodied and threaded through the actions and social relations of its people:

So after I am done cleaning out [my area], I go to the seniors and the widows. I start to clean out their driveways. Other people do this too ... To me, that is community. It has its own central identity. It’s not something that you just come home to. It’s something you live submersed in. You get involved. You see someone else’s kid who fell on the street, you go and help that kid out. You don’t say, ‘Oh dear, where are the parents?’ and then walk away. You’re not scared to help someone with their groceries because someone might be mad you because you touched her oranges. (I1, p. 5, line 1)

Several participants believed that strong communities are made up of people who want to bond and nurture social relationships.

Some participants voiced their belief that community is created when a group of people work toward a common goal or similar interest. Lynn perceived that a strong community is comprised of, “People who care about their common purpose” (I1, p. 8, line 8). As Kate indicated, “A strong community is when people are working together for the same goal” (I1, p. 6, line 1). April said, “I would say it’s [community] a group of people living in a similar area, generally having similar interests” (I1, p. 4, line 36) April

went on to explain that those similar interests are what draw people together and make community members comfortable socializing with each other.

When discussing how to establish and nurture community involvement in a catchment area, participants indicated that welcoming and valuing all types of community contributions was important. Lilly explained how small, individual actions are fundamental to the bigger picture of community:

Not every portion of what is done or needs to be done is always visible in the end product, but every portion of getting to that result is critical. If you miss that one step, for example, if you didn't have the coffee, and they were choking on dry cookies, maybe they [the audience/guests] wouldn't have been so receptive. That's all because we were missing our coffee pot person. (I2, p. 3, line 7)

Kate had a similar view of how the compilation of many small efforts is an important aspect of community involvement. "If there is a ball tournament going on, you take your turn flipping burgers. Nobody likes to do it, but, you know what, if everyone did it, you have 50 minutes worth of work" (I1, p. 5, line 12). Kate continued by explaining the negative consequences of limited community involvement. "If you only have two or three doing all the work for many, that's not good. I've been in that situation before and it burns people out" (I1, p. 6, line 12). When describing characteristics of a thriving community, Crystal said, "Getting everyone involved is the main thing" (I1, p. 5, line 13). Mark also believed in the power of numbers and highlighted that communal responsibilities need to be distributed within any association:

The number of times that I see executive bodies where two or three people will do all of the work, and there could be 20 people doing the jobs there. You must spread the work around. Even find piddly little things for them to do and expand on those. (I1, p. 11, line 15)

Tanya's words portrayed a similar idea:

If you open up and see what you can do as a group, it's so much more powerful. Then it's so much more of a celebration when something comes to fruition. But support is important. Even if you don't think somebody can do as good of a job as you can or can do their part, just bring them along and teach them so you can ask them to take on a little bit more later. (I1, p. 3, line 6)

Other participants explained that simple acts of socializing with a neighbor, stuffing envelopes for a local cause, smiling at a community member, and stopping to chat with the local storeowner are all important examples of community involvement. Many participants believed that the aggregation of small social acts is a core ingredient to the establishment and sustainability of the community's overall strength, welfare, and healthy sustainability.

When defining characteristics of strong communities, participants also talked about the idea of reciprocity. Many participants explained that when community members regularly interact with other community members, they often, unintentionally, received positive personal outcomes, which, they believed, generated more community spirit. Tabitha referred to a time when she had become ill. She described how the community supported her during that difficult time. "I was shocked by how much they were there for us" (I3, p. 3, line 3). Tabitha continued by saying, "I was really overwhelmed to be on the receiving end" (I3, p. 3, line 20). Brittany's words mirrored Tabitha's experience. "If a crisis happened everyone would get together and be there for you" (I1, p. 5, line 3). When describing the effects of community involvement, Lilly said, "What you give comes back, maybe not in the same form, maybe in a different form" (I1, p. 1, line 16). Lynn supported the concept of reciprocity, too: "It's about us giving back to the community, because our community gives so much to the school" (I1, p. 13, line 18). Ella also talked about personal returns that evolve when giving to others. "You have to be willing to step outside your own house, be friendly to other people, and

offer something of yourself to other people. In return you get something of other people back” (I1, p. 4, line 11). In this way, many participants explained that contributing to the welfare of a community often has both individual and collective benefits. Tabitha summed up a perceived result of reciprocity when she said, “Community involvement brings everyone in the community closer” (I3, p. 6, line 4).

The Impact of Children and Sports. Participants recognized children and sports as being extremely influential toward creating social relationships and supporting community involvement. Most participants commented that the children and sporting events had a catalytic influence on the creation, sustainability, and promotion of community programs, community involvement, and community pride. As Ricky said, “People are willing to help. They will do anything for the safety and health of their children” (I1, p. 15, line 1). Meagan believed many SCC members agreed to join the SCC solely for the benefit of their children. “They [SCC members] have their kids in the school. They have a personal interest in the SCC through their children. Otherwise, I don’t think there would be much of an interest for anyone to be on the SCC” (I2, p. 6, line 4). Mark stated that the reason he got involved with his local school council a number of years ago was because of his children. “We had children and, low and behold, I found myself involved in the [school council]. I was president of that for several years. I guess that was part of watching what my kids were doing at school” (I1, p. 1, line 24). Lynn claimed that people have a natural tendency to dedicate the majority of their time and attention to their children. “So all of your time and energy, right or wrong, is invested in your children’s happiness and success” (I1, p. 3, line 44). In relation to this

statement, Lynn added that if community involvement is a challenge within a community, promoting child-centered events is one way of successfully addressing the problem.

Some participants explained how children united community members who would not normally come together. Janelle said, “You certainly get to meet other parents of kids in school through your own kids” (I2, p. 8, line 28). Tabitha, who did not live within the immediate community of Sunshine, recognized that her children’s friends were vital to her contact with people in Sunshine. “I don’t really know the people in [Sunshine]. I find that right now the only way to get to know those people is through my kids. ... You get to know your kids’ friends and their parents” (I1, p. 3, line 33). Mark stated:

Your kids open up a lot of doors. They have all different types of friends. You meet their friends, and you meet their friends’ parents. That creates an entirely different community for parents than if you don’t have kids. That creates an entirely different community for parents than if you don’t have kids. (I1, p. 1, line 42)

Ella explained how having children created a sense of community in her local area:

As some of the young families started to have children, then we started to connect with each other during the week. At that point, I began to feel that there was a sense of community, because there was a connection. (I1, p. 2, line 46)

Cory stated, “Very definitely, absolutely the kids unite the community and make it grow” (I1, p. 12, line 1).

Alice, Cory, and Mark were three participants who did not have children in the public school system. Their comments indicated that other people’s children provided them with the impetus to support their community. Alice explained, “If my friends’ children were involved or if my grandchildren were involved, I would go to various school events” (I1, p. 8, line 26). Cory also indicated that if contacted, he would still support the school community. “I got all kinds of stuff at those [school] fundraising

sales, and I would still go to them. They may even still be on, but I never hear about them” (I2, p. 5, line 12). I asked Mark if he would be a guest speaker in a science class even though he did not have children attending the local school. His reply was, “I would be only too happy to help out with that sort of thing” (I1, p. 9, line 15).

The above comments indicated that participants believed that the existence of children and child-focused events provided an inlet for community members who do not have children to become involved with their community. Yet, in order for community members with no children to become involved with child-focused events, Alice, Cory, and Mark noted that the school community needed to contact them. Alice made this point clear when she said, “If there was a Tupperware Party down the street, I wouldn’t go if I wasn’t invited, even if I wanted to buy Tupperware. But I’d go if I was invited” (I2, p. 7, line 9). Cory also indicated, “If the school administration or if this Community Council made an effort to contact some of the people who no longer have kids at school, I think there would be a benefit to school attendance at events” (I2, p. 5, line 1).

Participants also talked about how sports, in general, and their children’s athletic activities had a positive influence on both social relationships and community involvement. Ricky said, “Sports are well taken in this community” (I1, p. 7, line 29). Meagan explained the importance of sports. “Sports bring the community together. That’s what I notice” (I2, p. 3, line 15). Participants indicated that community members united specifically because of youth sporting events. In Cory’s experience, once he began to socialize with other community members at sporting events, stronger, trusting relationships resulted:

The whole hockey thing was really a uniting, social thing for the group that we ended up being friends with. We are still friends with many of those people who

we met back when our kids were eight years old and playing hockey. (I2, p. 5, line 38)

Brittany also recognized how the athletic interests of her children inspired a new group of friends for herself and her husband. “Our whole life revolved around basketball, and, because of that, our friends changed. Those basketball kids and their parents were our unit all of a sudden” (I1, p. 6, line 15). Janelle explained, “That is a way they [parents] get to know each other is that they travel with their kids and talk to each other during sporting events. They support their kids and along the way they socialize with other parents” (I1, p. 6, line 10). Zoe made the comment that the most effective school-home communication was in the area of sports. She said, “The biggest way that they communicate with each other at this time would be through sport” (I1, p. 12, line 29). Thus, for a variety of reasons, sports appeared to be a conduit for relationship building.

Participants indicated that community members who were not involved with their child’s sports or community members who did not have children at home were less likely to socialize with sports-minded community members. Brittany indicated that after her children were grown, she felt like an outsider. She noted, “And once you don’t have kids there anymore, you just don’t have that wetted interest” (I1, p. 12, line 21). Brittany believed that sports-oriented citizens within Sunshine inadvertently marginalize community members without an interest in sports. “If your child didn’t play hockey or if they didn’t figure skate, there was no place for them at the rink” (I1, p. 1, line 39). Likewise, Tabitha believed that parents who were not involved with sports had fewer opportunities to become acquainted with other parents:

I think that those parents who don’t have their kids in sports, just don’t come out and don’t get involved to the same extent. In many ways, they don’t feel as connected to the school, as parents who have their kids in sports. (I3, p. 1, line 28)

Although most participants believed that sports socially unify community members, a few participants highlighted that sports can also inadvertently ostracize some community members.

In line with the unconstructive social aspects of sports, a number of participants were concerned with the high value they perceived that the school placed on sports, possibly to the exclusion of students with nonathletic abilities. As Tabitha indicated:

That is the impression that I get when I go to Awards Night—the stars, the ones who have been in track, football, volleyball, basketball—those are the stars of the school. They are the ones who walk away with a neck full of medals. (I3, p. 3, line 39)

Similarly, Ella was concerned about the attention the school gave to supporting athletic events:

For example, there is not as big of a hoopla made about drama or band, as compared to sports. Yes, in the school newsletter, the music festival winners always get mentioned. The band stuff gets mentioned. But do we have assemblies to ra-ra-ra the music students before they go off to do their festival? Do we have assemblies to ra-ra-ra the band before they go? I would like to see more of a balance, but that is my bias. (I2, p. 2, line 44)

Meagan believed that sports should not be the only factor within the school community that united community members. “I wish there were other connections with the community beside just sports. I don’t think that sports should be the only thing connecting the school with community all the time” (I1, p. 7, line 37). As well, Tanya compared the amount of parents/community members who came out to watch sporting events with the number of parents/community members who attended fine art performances. She remarked, “You know, they don’t come out in droves for the drama. They don’t come out like that for band” (I2, p. 5, line 26).

In contrast with the above statements, a couple of participants did not appear to be concerned about the emphasis that the school and community placed on sports. Mark

believed those community members who were not interested in sports had an individual responsibility to connect with people in some other fashion. “It is up to the individual to do it [find other interest besides sports]. If the individual is an introvert, then they are going to have problems” (I3, p. 3, line 20). April believed that the high focus that many people awarded to sports was an aspect of our cultural society:

There is a huge heroism that gets put on to the teams and especially on the ones who do well. Justly or unjustly, it’s a mirror of our society. If we take a look at the newspaper and the sports that we have within our nation, hockey stars, basketball stars, baseball stars, that’s where it’s at. Schools mirror that. (I2, p. 6, line 2)

Thus, some participants were concerned about how sports marginalized relationships; other participants appeared to accept the emphasis that society placed on sports.

Throughout all of the above comments, participants attached the concept of community involvement to the creation, promotion, and nurturance of social relationships. In the next section, participants highlight specific characteristics of bedroom communities, and they explain how such features affect community involvement in Sunshine.

Social Relationships in Sunshine’s Bedroom Community

In an effort to answer how social relationship impact community involvement, participants provided comments relating to characteristics of bedroom communities. They described features of Sunshine’s bedroom community, which included: (a) the existence of pocket communities, (b) the town’s proximity to the city, (c) the effects of immigration, and (d) the generational shift of values and lifestyle. Participants believed many of these noted features deterred the creation and nurturance of strong relationships and, in turn, stilted community involvement in Sunshine.

Pocket Communities and Diversity. Sunshine’s greater community extended across a large geographical area. As Ricky indicated, “This rural area covers a big

region” (I1, p. 2, line 34). Cory and Ella stated a similar point. “The local school community extends for miles and miles” (Cory, I1, p. 3, line 24), and “I think there is a challenge in the fact that the [Sunshine] community spans such a wide physical or geographical area” (Ella, I1, p. 5, line 45).

Participants not only described the greater community of Sunshine to be geographically vast, but socially diverse, as well. Ricky noted, “There is quite a range of families that are represented here. There is a variety of student backgrounds” (I1, p. 2, line 35). Zoe identified a specific area with a low socioeconomic status where, “Public Health goes out there and does a lot of work, and they [members in the pocket community] also work with the school” (I2, p. 13, line 30). Zoe described additional characteristics of the community of Sunshine. “It is very diverse. We have many different incomes. We have people who don’t have families; we have people who do have families. Now we are seeing an influx of people with smaller children” (I1, p. 2, line 24). Tanya described the lifestyle choices and religious diversities she witnessed within the community. She indicated, “We have some students who live a simple way of life, living with no frills. A couple of my students don’t have tv, no movies, no music, and that kind of thing” (I1, p. 6, line 1). Cory talked about the religious diversity of the community when he said, “Half of the community is [one religion]. We go to what we call [Sunshine Church]. ... There are some people who are [another religion] in the community, but there is no church for them” (I1, p. 11, line 22). From such an assortment of comments, participants explained that Sunshine’s greater community incorporated geographical, social, economic, and some religious diversity.

Because Sunshine's greater community incorporated a large region and ethnical and socioeconomic diversity, participants talked about the existence of pocket communities. Some participants believed the existence of these pocket communities curtailed the greater community of Sunshine from sharing a common focus. Tanya said, "This community really has this small-town feel, but at the same time, there was this feeling of disconnectedness, because really it's all these other communities that feed into [Sunshine] and make 'community'" (I1, p. 3, line 38). Janelle agreed saying, "I think one challenge is developing a close sense of connection among one another, because [Sunshine] is really made of lots of pockets of smaller communities that all come into our school" (I1, p. 4, line 25).

Participants believed that distance and populace diversity directly affected the socialization patterns of the populace. Cory stated that, due to distance, the children within the school community predominantly only interacted with each other during school hours. "The kids who go to school here, the only place they see each other is at the school, because they live 20 miles away from each other" (I1, p. 3, line 35). Tabitha made the comment that distance was a core reason why she had limited involvement with the school. "For me, as a community member, the reason I don't go to community/school events ... is because of distance" (I3, p. 7, line 31). Participants believed that because the greater community of Sunshine encompassed such a large geographical area, community members were less likely to interact with each other, and, consequently, they were less likely to unite for community causes. As Janelle indicated, "There are lots of people in our school who don't even know each other" (I1, p. 5, line 15). Alice used many of the same words when describing what she perceived to be the social effects of pocket

communities of Sunshine: “Lots of people don’t know each other” (I1, p. 1, line 33).

Thus, partially due to the physical dynamics of Sunshine’s populace, some participants believed that people within the greater community of Sunshine socially interacted less than if they would if they would be living in a smaller geographical community.

In relation to a pocket community, one participant provided details about her individual pocket community. In Tabitha’s view, her pocket community was a prosperous mini-community, and her portrayal of her community provided detailed descriptions of one pocket community, in particular. Below, I present Tabitha’s detailed description of her pocket community.

A Focus on Tabitha’s Pocket Community. Although Tabitha was a citizen of Sunshine’s greater community, Tabitha stated that she did not identify Sunshine as her true community. She explained that her real community embodied the handful of neighbors surrounding her house. She said, “My neighbors are like my family” (I2, p. 5, line 8). I asked Tabitha if there was a neighborhood watch program that assisted in uniting her pocket community. She replied, “There is a neighborhood watch, but that doesn’t do anything for what we are talking about” (I2, p. 6, line 44). Tabitha went on to depict her reality of community involvement in her pocket community.

For Tabitha, community involvement was created and reflected in informal ways. Tabitha explained that the families in her pocket community regularly borrowed/lent carpentry tools from/to each other. In times of need, neighbors shared the odd egg or cup of sugar. As Tabitha said, “I would say there are five houses that I feel comfortable walking in and just taking an egg out of their fridge when they are not home” (I2, p. 4, line 27). For Tabitha, community incorporated a dimension of trust. She reiterated this

point when she said, “Everyone has everyone else’s keys to their houses” (I2, p. 4, line 21). Because Tabitha’s husband had mechanical and carpentry skills, he often fixed the neighbors’ cars and helped them during household crises. Tabitha explained that people within her pocket community engaged in regular conversations with each other while walking the foot trails located around the parameters of the local area. The members of the community also socialized during annual community barbeques:

Then for about three consecutive years, maybe four after that, he [a neighbor] hosted this community barbeque, and what we would do is ride our bikes around. We would put invitations into all of the mailboxes. All of the time, when there were new families within the neighborhood, we would go to their houses personally and hand them an invitation. One family who we are now very close to, at the time we knew they were new so we went and taped an invitation on their garage door because they weren’t home. (I2, p. 7, line 6)

Tabitha appeared to be happy and energized as she described examples of community involvement present in her pocket community.

Tabitha’s central motive for supporting her community was captured in her personal belief that doing good for others was, in and of itself, self-gratifying. “That’s why I always tell my neighbor when I do something for them and she wants to repay us—I say, ‘Don’t rob me of a blessing’” (I3, p. 6, line 27). When I asked Tabitha if she and the members of her pocket community shared a common religious belief, Tabitha replied, “None of them [the neighbors] go to my church. A lot of them go to similar churches, but not all of them” (I2, p. 6, line 37). “For me it doesn’t matter if people go to church” (I2, p. 6, line 30). Tabitha explained that the community members of her pocket community accepted each other and were excited to have new people join their community. “Then when they moved out here, I said to my other neighbors, ‘They need to be welcomed to the neighborhood.’ So we all go together and made a big fruit platter

and cream puffs [for them]” (I2, p. 4, line 39). For Tabitha, it was important and exciting to welcome new people to her pocket community.

As highlighted above, Tabitha provided many examples of what she perceived to be community involvement in her pocket community. Through her examples, a core characteristic of her pocket community was the existence of active social relationships. “We visit. We talk about everything deep in our lives and what’s going on. She knows my family now. I know her family. It’s just been an amazing relationship” (I2, p. 6, line 10). For her, community involvement appeared to be dependent upon locality and the relationship that ensued therein.

The information provided in the next section in many ways contrasts with Tabitha’s pocket community description. Within the next section, participants identify specific features they perceived to negatively affect the social unity of the greater community of Sunshine.

The Impact of the Town’s Proximity to the City. As identified in chapter 1, a bedroom community is a community that is proximal to an urban center and has much of its populace commuting to the city. Some participants described what they believed to be common characteristics of bedroom communities and how these features negatively affected the concept of community. Kate said:

In my perception of a bedroom community, if I live in a bedroom community, I come home from work, have my supper, watch a bit of tv, play a bit with my kids, and go to bed. I want things done for me. (I1, p. 4, line 32)

Ricky’s comments reiterated similar concerns. “As we know, [Sunshine] is a bedroom community. People have their nine-to-five jobs. They get home. They have their families and stuff, but that’s pretty well where it [community involvement] stops” (I1, p. 4, line 39). Alice added that family connections have dissipated because, “It’s [Sunshine]

not a generational community any more. There is no grandma and grandpa here” (I1, p. 9, line 27). Cory described a bedroom community as “half a community” (I1, p. 16, line 13). Kate’s comment was, “To use this term bedroom community terrifies me” (I1, p. 4, line 27).

Participants indicated that the close distance between Sunshine and the nearby city negatively affected the focus community members gave toward their community and toward each other. Cory explained that the majority of community members spend most of their working hours away from their local community:

Pretty well all of my neighbors and me have been or are commuters. That is, we drive to the city for our work. Whether it’s people who have a quarter of land or those people who live on acreages, most of them work in the city. The people who are just farmers in this community are, very definitely, a minority. It is a bedroom community for people who work in the city. (I1, p. 2, line 15)

As April perceived, the boon of the city’s proximity was also a bane to the community’s social cohesion:

Being a bedroom community is a dichotomy. It has its blessings and at the same time those blessings have a negative side. One of those things about being a bedroom community is that you do have all of those advantages that comes with being in a larger center, without actually being in that larger center. You can top up your grocery list or you can take in a movie. (I1, p. 7, line 33)

April continued by saying:

So one of the things with being so close to the city is that you get a little bit of those leftover feelings of being lost in the rush. You might pass by your neighbors too quickly without giving them that old country charm. (I1, p. 8, line 12)

In fact, many participants blamed the city for what they perceived as Sunshine’s lack of community involvement. For example, Alice said:

For so many people [in Sunshine], the city is their main focus. The city is where they bring their kids for a lot of events. The city is where they work. The city is where they do their shopping and socializing. So, I guess, in a sense, we don’t

need each other as much as communities, which are further away from the city.
(I1, p. 2, line 43)

Lilly agreed with Alice saying, “The majority of their [community members’] waking hours are spent outside the community. Because they spend that time away, they are not making those social contacts within the community” (I1, p. 5, line 44). Brittany stated, “My realization is that this town must be too close to the city. That close distance causes our community not to have as strong of a family-like connection” (I1, p. 4, line 11). Tabitha added, “So activities in a small community are greatly beneficial to the community feeling, but once you are off to the city, that makes you too busy for other people in your community” (I2, p. 1, line 28). Participants explained that the lure of the city’s abundant and varied resources predisposed many community members to spend their time, talent, and money within the city. These actions appeared to demote the importance and nurturance of personal and social relationships within Sunshine’s greater community.

Community members from Sunshine relied on the city in a number of direct ways. Ella said, “We look for things in the city, for example, daycare” (I1, p. 6, line 3). Cory talked about the entertainment/recreational opportunities presented throughout the city: “The city is close. Once a week, we go to a dance club” (I1, p. 13, line 17). The proximity of the city provided Sunshine’s citizenry with access to competitive consumer prices, with which a smaller community outlet could not compete: “Well, for getting pizza for fundraising, it’s really good to be close to the city” (Crystal, I1, p. 10, line 8). In summary, some participants recognized that many of its citizens were less attentive and committed to the social, emotional, and financial needs of their local community because the city was better equipped to conveniently provide such needs.

Not only did Sunshine's community members themselves appear to be influenced by the city, participants described how the city also influenced Sunshine's School. As Crystal indicated:

For fieldtrips, the people in gym were always able to go somewhere because the city was so close ... they were constantly going bowling, rock climbing, and snorkelling. They went to the city constantly, every second day they went. (I1, p. 10, line 17)

A few participants noted that some of Sunshine's school-aged children attended city schools. Alice said, "Some kids who live in [the] community or in the area don't even attend school in [Sunshine]. They go to the city for school" (I1, p. 5, line 6). Lilly provided a reason why some community members preferred to take their children to a city school. "If we are driving anyway and going right past the school, we can just drop them off. Then we can pick them up on the way home" (I2, p. 9, line 38). Lilly's statement highlighted that idea that the city's nearby resources were convenient for Sunshine's population.

Many participants highlighted the point that most of Sunshine's teachers lived in the city. Janelle indicated, "Very few staff members live in the community" (I1, p. 7, line 43). Because many teachers resided in the city and commuted to Sunshine for work, teachers indicated that they were not as involved in local community events. Meagan (a commuting teacher) expressed, "I really don't feel like I am a part of this community, so I am not very knowledgeable about the specifics of this community" (I1, p. 3, line 24). Tanya (another commuting teacher) indicated that she did not know a lot about the Sunshine's businesses and public facilities:

It's kind of cool to go to a small town café on your professional development days and go into the community ... I had to go to the town hall to get a raffle license. Otherwise, I probably wouldn't have [gone into the community]." (I1, p. 5, line 3)

Cory added:

Certainly one of the challenges is to have the professionals, like teachers, be more oriented to focusing their energy upon the community or even have them live in the community. There is a vast reservoir of talent there that communities like [Sunshine] don't or can't access ... So that is one of the problems of being a bedroom community. The potential leaders of the community don't live in the community. (I1, p. 35, line 35)

In contrast to Cory, Janelle perceived that the school staff was generally supportive of school and community activities. "I think our staff is very supportive as far as coming out for sports events. I mean it's not unusual to see six or eight teachers who have never coached volleyball or basketball coming out to tournament" (I1, p. 8, line 1). Brittany also recognized the presence of teachers to contribute to the community. "We get teachers from the city who always come out from the city, watch their [the students'] hockey games, or whatever" (I1, p. 7, line 43). Janelle and Brittany's comments of teacher involvement within the school community were exceptions. In general, participants believed teachers were not as involved in Sunshine's community events, as they would be if they were to live within Sunshine's greater community.

The Effects of Immigration. The community of Sunshine seemed to face a conundrum. Due to the influx of new community members, the community was beginning to prosper financially; however, many participants perceived the diverse interests and identities of new community members to be harmful to the community's social unity. Alice, who had lived in Sunshine for most of her life, described what she believed to be Sunshine's past status and how that has changed. "We were a well-kept secret out there. Now it's starting to grow, and we are not as close-knit as we used to be" (I1, p. 1, line 32). Brittany reiterated a similar message. "But this community was a very active community, with a lot of Rec Boards. There were numerous things going on in

this community when we moved here 20 years ago” (I1, p. 1, line 14). Brittany continued by saying, “Then everything sort of went to a standstill” (I1, p. 1, line 25). Zoe said, “So the community 15 years ago was very different. Everybody was incredibly close” (I1, p. 2, line 22). Cory provided an interesting narrative pertaining to how an older established member of Sunshine described the inception of Sunshine’s bedroom status:

The guy who was running the Rec. Board at the time was a fellow who lived in [Sunshine]. He said, “In this community, there are three groups of people. There are the old timers, whose dads and grandfathers lived in this area. They were the homesteaders. Then there are the new guys. They are people who didn’t have a family history in the community and had lived here for a few years. Then there are the new-new people. The new-new people were people who had been here for about six months to a year. They come into a community, and they have all these new ideas of what they want to do. They want to do this and that. The new people have been here long enough, and they know these ideas are not going to fly. So the new people are just kind of sit back listening to these new-new people. Then there are the old people, who constitute the majority of people in the community. The old people just wished that the new people and the new-new people would go back to where they came from and leave them alone. (I1, p. 9, line 25)

In summary, many participants perceived Sunshine’s new people as partially responsible for bringing social changes to their small community, and many participants perceived these changes to be a negative influence on the social unity of their bedroom community.

Several participants explained that the people immigrating to Sunshine were predominantly from the city, and participants perceived that these new city people brought an urban-lifestyle perspective with them. Ricky used an example when talking about how city immigrants were changing the social customs of Sunshine:

My wife's family lives in [the city], and I see how it is for them. They don't wave to people as much. They don't say hello to strangers ... Yes, and I'm afraid that that is what it has turned into more so here. I suppose about 75% of our population has turned in that direction. (I1, p. 14, line 3)

Ella talked about the city mentality of new people when she said, “So I think people who have lived in the city for a long time ... and come to a small community, they are used to

locking everything up and keeping everything tight, not trusting your neighbor” (I1, p. 5, line 25). Kate defined aspects of a stereotypical urban lifestyle when she said, “I have talked to many people in the city who don’t know their neighbors. They have lived there for many years and do not know their next door neighbor ... That type of world scares me” (I1, p. 5, line 38). Cory said, “I just wish that someone from these groups [new people to the community] would get off of their hind end and help to develop this community” (I1, p. 10, line 4). As indicated from these comments, participants often identified new people as individuals migrating from urban centers. Consequently, these new people brought their urban social propensities to Sunshine’s community. Some participants were concerned that an urban culture was permeating their small community.

Other participants recognized that welcoming new people to Sunshine was a challenge for some community members. Alice indicated, “You still have that old clique of people who first came there in the 70s. They stick to themselves, for the most part” (I1, p. 2, line 36). Mark recognized a similar challenge when he described something he referred to as “The Saskatchewan Disease:”

The province of Saskatchewan was settled about 100 years ago by one million people. It is still one million people ... Many families have remained and consolidated and consolidated and consolidated. There has been very little moving into this province. So you have very deep roots in this province. You might say that the roots are strangling the development of the tree. I’d say that this town had probably two or three families who control this town. It’s not done malevolently. It just happens to be done that way, whether it’s through the Council or whatever. That is maybe what is slowing things down. (I2, p. 7, line 6)

Lynn described what it was like to move to a community where the majority of its members had generational roots: “It didn’t matter how much volunteer time I put in. It didn’t matter how many people I knew, or how much coffee I drank. We were outsiders”

(I1, p. 9, line 26). Brittany believed that the community of Sunshine was doing a poor job of welcoming new community members:

What do people do when they move into this community? ... When you are new to this community, you don't get the knock on the door and the muffins delivered anymore. So I always thought, "What a lonely community to move into." (I1, p. 10, line 42)

Such comments reflected some of the social challenges that new people often faced when moving into a new community. In their remarks, some participants highlighted their belief that in order for community involvement to prosper, established community members needed to welcome, accommodate, and accept new members to their community.

A Generational Shift of Values and Lifestyles. Not only did some participants acknowledge that the immigrant population brought social change to Sunshine, participants spoke about the changes the younger generation brought to Sunshine. Brittany described the attitude of the current younger generation of Sunshine and compared it to the community-minded outlook of Sunshine's past generation:

There are just a lot of younger families again, and they are just not interested. They are just too busy ... Maybe it's the spoiled generation out there that is unfolding. We are as guilty with our children. We give our children everything, so they are used to having everything. Now they are at the age that they should be giving back, and they say, "No." Or, they may say, "Tell me how much to cut a check for, but don't ask me to work at it." Or, "I would love to see it, but I don't want to be involved in the process of getting it." I don't know if that is the way it really is or if that is just my interpretation of it. (I1, p. 13, line 22)

Ricky was concerned how the work ethics of the younger generation differed from his generation: "I think our whole society is changing, even with the young people in the workforce ... Their goals are different than ours were" (I1, p. 6, line 3). Alice was discouraged by the fact that these days, Sunshine's young students tended not to walk to school, and she believed walking is an important part of a child's socialization process:

Many of their parents drive their kids to school and then they go pick them up for lunch. Then they take them back to school, and they go back again to pick them up at the end of school. I think walking to school is a very important part of a kid's social upbringing. (I1, p. 4, line 5)

In general, some participants directly stated or implied that the younger generation did not value socializing or participating in community events as compared to the past generation. Participants explained that, compared to Sunshine's older generation, the present generation was more self-centered in attitude and actions, which had a negative impact on community involvement.

Other participants added that the fast-paced modern lifestyle de-emphasized social interaction. Lilly believed that the busy lifestyle of much of Sunshine's modern-day populace was partially responsible for what she believed was a decrease in community focus. More specifically, Lilly claimed that one of the main reasons why people tended not to get involved with their community was due to lack of time:

You look at our community ... We have the wealthy professionals and business owners. They have very little time. To them volunteering is like this: We need to build a [community structure]. Great, how big should I write the check?" They don't have time, and what little time they do have, they need for their recreation and to spend with their family. (I1, p. 9, line 11)

Zoe believed that due to the higher cost of living and increases in housing prices, dual incomes were a necessity for many families. In turn, parents had less time to dedicate toward community endeavors. "Now they [parents] are required to have a big mortgage, and two of them are going to need to work. So we are going to have to change how we think about community members volunteering" (I1, p. 7, line 45). When talking to Tanya about changes to today's society, she stated, "People are time-crunched, that's for sure" (I1, p. 17, line 9). Tabitha added that because of the hectic pace of modern-day life, it is

difficult to get community members to attend meetings. “Well, due to busy lifestyles, the biggest challenge [of the SCC] is to get people to come to the meeting” (I2, p. 2, line 18).

Most participants agreed that people these days are busy; however, some participants pointed out that many citizens choose to spend their time on events that supported individualistic needs and desires. Kate said, “Everyone is so busy with their own stuff” (I1, p. 5, line 41). Lilly added, “These days, everyone is so busy building for the benefit of themselves” (I1, p. 6, line 38). Ricky and Tabitha both believed that the fast-pace lifestyle of many modern-day people is largely self-inflicted and that many people chose to fill their days with events, which were not predominantly focused on forming and sustaining social relationships. Kate indicated, “The problem with ‘bedroom communities’ is that a lot of people just want their own privacy” (I1, p. 13, line 17). Ricky explained what he perceived to be the outcome of promoting self-centered interests and a private lifestyle:

I feel that that is probably why our volunteers have dwindled. The people get home. They have their own lives, and that is where they want to be. I don't want to seem down on my community, because I do like it here. I wouldn't want to live anywhere else, but it is disappointing to not see the involvement that there could be. (I1, p. 14, line 9)

Some participants indicated that many of Sunshine’s new generation of people valued social isolation. Some participants perceived these individualistic tendencies to negatively affect the amount of community involvement they were witnessing within Sunshine.

Augmented Data

Observational data collected at SCC meetings provided additional information on how social relationships influenced community involvement in the school community. During my attendance at SCC meetings, I perceived that trusting social relationships

between SCC members were developing. Indeed, SCC members were friendly to each other and generally respectful of the comments and views of fellow members during the meetings. Interestingly, however, SCC members did not seem to be knowledgeable about the personal lives of associate members. It was my impression that members did not socialize with each other outside the start and end of SCC meetings. Thus, although the SCC appeared to be an amicable group, the members did not overtly appear to possess strong relationships with each other.

All elected SCC members present at the meetings were female and appeared to be of a similar ethnic background. All SCC members appeared to be knowledgeable about the school culture, specific teachers, and school programs. It is my perception that because SCC members represented a similar age group, socioeconomic status, and cultural background, the association was well-equipped to promote community involvement in school through White ethno-cultural values.

In line with issues addressed above, I included comments pertaining to interdependency of community members and the importance of a caring attitude within my reflective journal. Early in my data collection, I questioned the idea of community spirit and its relation to communal dependency:

So from where does community spirit come? Historically, I think it came from the pioneers and their dependence upon each other for reasons of personal survival. These days, we are able to be much more independent of each other, and, as a result, community spirit appears to be lacking. (Journal, p. 6, line 5)

A few months into my data collection, I wrote my thoughts on the association between attitude and community spirit: “[This person] is a very important member of her community because she cares about others. She gives selflessly to her community. As a result, I believe her community has enriched community spirit” (Journal, p. 26, line 11).

In another journal excerpt, I documented some thoughts on the positive and negative aspects of bedroom communities and community involvement. In particular, this following passage was written after interviewing one participant who sadly referred to a trodden path that was located in Sunshine and had become grown-over with grass:

I think the overgrown path reference could be used as a metaphor for bedroom communities in both positive and negative ways. [This participant] thought the overgrown path was a sign of the times in that people weren't walking with each other or socializing and that the old ways of the community were being buried. I think the overgrown path could also represent new potential springing from the earth/community, changing the landscape of that community. Often with change comes new opportunity. (Journal, p. 15, line 1)

In my reflections after interviewing another participant, I referred to the negative aspects of community involvement. "This interviewing experience provided me with a new insight into the cruel side of community. The concept of community can be very hurtful to those who are not welcomed into its circle" (Journal, p. 33, line 7).

Just as with the first and second research questions, my observations at SCC meetings and information documented within my journal reinforced a predominant theme. Community involvement appears to be dependent on the existence of active and positive social relationships.

Summary

Participants indicated that the existence and nurturance of social relationships was a core ingredient needed for active community involvement. Many participants defined strong communities as those that possess a populace where people are dependent on each other. Furthermore, many participants believed strong communities are made up of citizens who possess a communal attitude and support common goals. Some participants also indicated that supporting one's community had individual and communal reciprocal benefits. The majority of participants identified children and sports as relationship-

building catalysts. They believed these relationships positively influence community involvement.

Participants also identified specific features of Sunshine's bedroom community that they believed were responsible for their perceived lack social networks within their community. In turn, they perceived these limited social networks to negatively influence community involvement. Many participants talked about how the geographical distance and social diversities of Sunshine's pocket communities resulted in limited socialization between community members. As well, most participants explained that, due to the nearness and convenience of the city, many of Sunshine's citizens were dependent upon the city for personal and professional resources. As such, Sunshine's populace was not highly dependent upon its neighbors. In addition, some participants explained that the influx of new members to Sunshine changed some of the social customs of the community. Some participants believed that the generational shift of values was a reason why a new generation of community members possessed a different concept of community, which, in general, did not augment community involvement.

Chapter Summary

Throughout this chapter, a number of thematic issues arose when analyzing the role a school council played in encouraging community involvement in a K to 12 bedroom community. Comments from participants regarding the first research question indicated that the SCC influence on community involvement was evolving. The somewhat limited influence the SCC had on community involvement in the school was partially due to the newness of the SCC policy. SCC members were experiencing a steep learning curve. Furthermore, the SCC had limited visibility within the school

community. The vast majority of the teachers and community members interviewed either did not know of the SCC or had a limited understanding the roles and responsibilities of the SCC.

The second research question focused upon documenting the perceived benefits and challenges of community involvement. When discussing the benefits of community involvement, participants purported that the main gain from community involvement was exemplified via community support for pre-existing traditional school programs and activities. For the most part, participants indicated that community involvement in the school should ideally include traditional activities such as attending school events, volunteering for school events, fundraising, and utilizing local guest speakers to reinforce school curricula. In turn, community involvement positively affected the social cohesion of the school community. More specifically, several participants explained that community involvement enriched the quality and increased the quantity of parent-parent, parent-teacher, and school-community relationships. One participant explained that community involvement had reciprocal benefits for the school and community members. As well, one participant highlight that the idea that community involvement improved the school experience of students.

Most SCC participants perceived the predominant challenge regarding community involvement in school was reflected through the SCC policy and its formal requirements, which were misaligned with the community's traditional definitions of community involvement. The formalities and newness of the policy were frustrating for most SCC members, and they recognized the bureaucratic aspects of the policy to be time-consuming and/or irrelevant. All teachers interviewed believed that the SCC's influence

should be limited to issues that were not related to directly impacting their classroom curricula. As well, some community members commented that the bureaucratic aspects of formal organizations such as SCCs often limit the impact of such associations. In turn, many participants were doubtful that the SCC should or could have a voice in academic decision-making.

The thematic presentation to the final research question focused on the idea that relationships are precursors to community involvement. Participants' philosophies of community highlighted that a strong community is created from a socially active group of people who are dependent upon each other, promote communal welfare, and work toward a common goal. Participants believed that children and sports socially unite community members, which is needed if community involvement is to thrive. For a number of reasons, many participants attributed the bedroom status of Sunshine to negatively influence community involvement. The social contact between many community members with Sunshine's bedroom community was limited due to geographical distance, the city's proximity, an influx of new community members, and a generational shift of values and lifestyles.

In the next chapter, I analyze this chapter's data findings utilizing social capital theory (Putnam, 1993, 1995a, 1995b, 2000, 2007). In such a manner, a deeper, theoretical understanding of the study's results is created.

CHAPTER 5: ANALYSIS OF DATA RESULTS

Within this chapter, I revisit the thematic interpretations of each research question and employ social capital theory (Putnam, 1993, 1995a, 1995b, 2000, 2007) as a lens through which to analyze the data results. Also incorporated into this theoretical examination, I re-examine the literature presented in chapter 2. Through such efforts, I present a multi-layered understanding of the purpose of my study, which was to explore the role a school council plays in encouraging community involvement in a K to 12 school located within a bedroom community.

Building Trusting SCC Relationships

The thematic message emanating from the data pertaining to the first research question was that the SCC's influence on community involvement in school was still evolving. Why was the SCC impact on community involvement in a stage of evolution? How does the development of trusting relationships coincide with SCC productivity? How do past studies relate to this study? How are concepts of bonding, bridging, and linking social capital linked with the SCC's ability to influence community involvement in school? I address these questions in the following analytical presentation.

SCCs Need Time and Trust to Utilize Social Capital

Kerr's (2003, 2005) research on school councils stipulated that a key factor influencing the effectiveness of school councils is the existence of trust among its members. Kerr's work also specified that garnering trust among members takes time.

Similar to Kerr's research, Putnam's (2000) work addressed the topic of trust. Putnam claimed that trust within an organization is the degree to which individuals confide in each other, tactfully discuss sensitive issues, and are confident that fellow members will not abuse their trust. Other scholars also stipulate that trust is an indicator of social capital. For example, Coleman (1988), Fukuyama (1996), and Zak and Knack (2001) purported that high levels of trust between members of an organization indicates there are strong levels of social capital within that organization. Poulsen and Tingaard Svendsen (2005) went so far as to say, "Trust is social capital" (p. 3). As outlined in chapter 3, Putnam (1995a) defined social capital as "features of social life—networks, norms, and *trust* [emphasis added]—that enable participants to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives" (pp. 664–665). I too believe trust and social capital are interlinked. More specifically, I view social capital as the potential that arises from the prevalence of trust. It is under these premises that I utilize tenets of social capital theory to analyze the data findings.

During my data collection, Sunshine's SCC was almost two years old. Not only was the SCC new to the school community, but as a result of a recent SCC election, about one-third of the members were new to the organization. During the time of my study, Sunshine's SCC had seven elected members, three of whom had only been with the association for approximately three months. Consequently, the SCC was developing trusting relationships between its members and with members of the school community.

A more detailed description of the relationships SCC members shared with each other is recognized by reviewing Putnam's (2000) terms *thin trust* and *thick trust* (pp. 136–137). An example of thin trust is the type of trust an individual may have with an

acquaintance. By comparison, thick trust is “trust embedded in personal relations that are strong, frequent, and nested in wider networks” (p. 136). Indeed, there is a marked difference, for instance, between the thin trust established among acquaintances sitting next to each other on a bus and the thick trust established among lifelong friends. As acknowledged above, many of the members on Sunshine’s SCC were new to the organization and to each other. They appeared somewhat unsure of each other’s backgrounds, talents, and interests; hence, many members shared thin levels of trust. Because many SCC members shared thin levels of trust, the SCC members did not yet possess a strong awareness of the group’s overall potential.

Beebe and Masterson (2009) believed trust within organizations matures when an individual can predict how other individuals will behave in a given situation. Ideally, as SCC members get to know each other and gain confidence in their fellow members, their thin trust manifests into thick trust. As thin levels of trust are transformed into thicker levels of trust, communicating with each other and community members likely becomes more natural and comfortable for SCC members. In turn, SCC members gain confidence in their roles. As Putnam (2000) indicated, trust lubricates cooperation and communication. Within an organization, high levels of communication, cooperation, and role confidence promote innovation and productivity (Fukuyama, 1996; Putnam, 1993; 2000). As applied to the SCC, once the organization displays high levels of communication, cooperation, and confidence, there is a greater probability that the SCC will enhance community involvement within the school. A visual representation of the association between: (a) the SCC’s thick trust; (b) level of communication, cooperation, and confidence; and (c) the probable enhancement of community involvement in school

is captured in *Figure 2* below. Contextualized within this study, because insufficient time had passed, thick trust was not apparent between members, and this point may have influenced the SCC members' ability to influence community involvement in school.

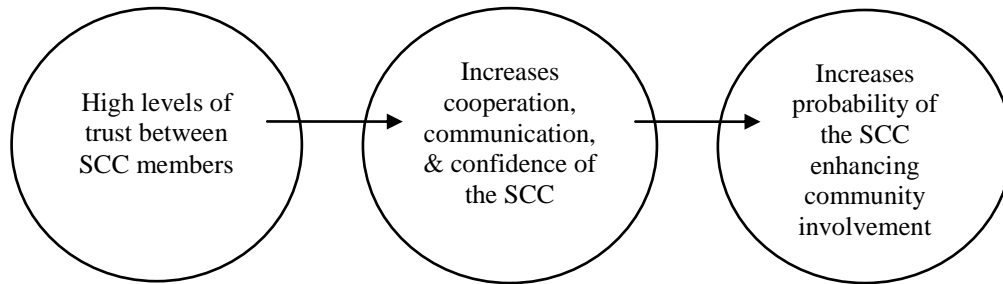


Figure 2. The effect of established trust between SCC members.

Also on the subject of trust and time is the question of what happens to the established trust that is present within an organization when members leave and new members join. In relation to school councils, the length of time individuals maintain membership can influence the maturation level of the organization and the levels of trust shared between members (Kerr, 2005). The Ontario School Council Support Center (2008) noted that a constant influx of new volunteers to school councils negatively influences the formation of strong trust between school council members. In such circumstances, trust (thin trust) must redevelop (into thick trust) each time new individuals are welcomed to a school council. The idea that trust was being re-developed was mirrored through the SCC's new membership. During the time of my study, one-third of Sunshine's SCC members were new to the organization within the past few months. This reality likely affected levels of trust within the organization.

Upon review of the SCCs policy's terms of office directive, a point of contention arises pertaining to time and trust. As outlined in the School Community Council handbook, "Approximately one-half of the representative parent and community

members are elected each year,” (Endsin & Melvin, n.d., p. 43). Because developing thick trust takes time, the potential for SCC members to experience thick trust becomes restricted unless the incumbent SCC members seek reelection and are reelected. In contrast, when newly-elected SCC members are integrated into the organization, the thick trust that had ideally developed between former SCC members may be demoted to thin trust with the integration of new members. Putnam (1993) indicated that as trust gets thinner, it becomes less useful or powerful in anchoring norms of honesty and reciprocity within an association. Thus, the SCC terms of office directive may defer the sustainability of thick trust within the SCC. With the potential annual influx of half of its members, the ability for SCC members to sustain trusting relationships for more than one year is in question.

It is essential to highlight that within any organization trusting relationships do not automatically ensue with prolonged membership or social contact. Otherwise stated, time and experience cannot guarantee trust. Garnering trust within an organization is dependent upon internal and external factors pertaining to the realities of the association and its members. Even with the passage of time, trust between some or all members may be stagnant in organizations displaying domineering leadership, an extremely large membership, individuals with negative attitudes, individuals with personal agendas, and/or individuals who do not carry her share of the workload (Beebe & Masterson, 2009; David, 1994; Flinspach & Ryan, 1994). Reviewing the data, it was not apparent that Sunshine’s SCC was affected by such trust-deterrent examples. For instance, SCC participants did not indicate they experienced power struggles within the association, and participants did not talk about domineering leadership. Thus, based on the SCC’s

internal factors, the SCC members appeared well-situated to develop high levels of trust between its members.

Although research has documented that trust between school council members needs to accrue in order for school councils to be productive (Kerr, 2005), one core component that school council research has neglected is the consideration that trust also needs to exist between the SCC and the community members. Within Sunshine's school community, the vast majority of participant teachers and community members indicated they knew little to nothing about their SCC. Before levels of trust can be utilized as a possible social capital leverage for increasing community involvement in school, communicating the existence and rationale of the SCC to the school community is useful. That is, it is important that SCC members attempt to develop at least thin levels of trust with as many community members as possible because, as indicated previously, trust enables collaboration and communication (Putnam, 2000), which positively influence community involvement in school.

Not only will developing trust between SCC and community members likely facilitate community involvement in school, nurturing such trust is a crucial step toward enabling social cohesion within the school community. Participant comments reinforced this point. They had very specific views on how to nurture trust, and they provided examples of such actions. Participants believed that community involvement meant such things as having coffee with neighbors, supporting fundraising, cooking burgers at community events, and attending school functions strengthened the social cohesion of their community. Although participants did not label it as such, through such comments, they indirectly supported the merits of social capital theory. Kay and Johnston (2007)

recognized the importance of socializing when they stated social capital is a by-product of social interaction; Coleman (1990) maintained that “social relationships die out if not maintained” (p. 321). Upon uniting the participants’ purviews of community involvement and social capital ideologies, pertinent SCC questions arise. What if the core purpose of SCCs was to sustain and embellish social relationships within the school community? How would such a mandate affect the academic wellbeing of students?

Interestingly, many social capital scholars have found a direct correlation between high levels of social capital within a community and academic student achievement. Putnam (2000) reported that students who live in American states with higher levels of social capital achieve better academic results on national tests. British data mirror a similar correlation. As compared to English regions with lower levels of social capital, English regions with rich stocks of social capital report higher academic attainment of 16 year-old students (Halpern, 2005). A similar message originates from Coleman (1988) who argued that a community rich with stocks of social capital generates greater potential for student achievement as compared to a community with low levels of social capital. As reflected in participant comments, traditional forms of community involvement keep social relationships alive, which, according to social capital theory, are related to the academic achievements of students. Putnam contended that rather than blaming the teachers, the curriculum, or school academics for a lack of student achievement, the social tendencies of people within the school community needs investigation.

Reviewing Characteristics of Effective School Councils

Epstein (2005) and Sheldon (2003) conducted research on action teams. In many ways, action teams are similar to SCCs. For example, both action teams and SCCs are

directed by school improvement goals, annually review these goals, and plan future goals. The results of this SCC study align with some of the findings of action team research. As espoused specifically by Epstein (2001), an effective action team is socially and professionally united when the members are guided by well-defined goals. Within my research, I found that the mandate of the SCC policy specifically pertaining to SCC support for the *Learning Improvement Plan* united the SCC members, to a certain extent. For example, members were well-versed in the three targets of the *Learning Improvement Plan*, and several SCC accomplishments resulted from the directive of the *Learning Improvement Plan*. The SCC appeared to be forming its identity, in part, around its mandated responsibility to support the *Learning Improvement Plan*. Additionally, the SCC's policy mandate (to increase student wellbeing and community involvement through school improvement goals) spotlighted a common aim for the group. Through attendance at SCC meetings, I witnessed how this SCC mandate united them. I often heard SCC members cite the SCC purpose and question whether new ideas fit within the domains of the purpose. This shared purview brought focus to meetings and assisted the members in decision-making processes. As a result, members appeared more confident in their roles and shared thin levels of trust. Reiterated by Melvin (2006) and Stevenson (2001), a school council led by common goals enables productive, strong relationships between its members.

In other ways, the findings of research conducted on action teams contrasts this study. Sunshine's SCC did not influence community involvement in school to the extent of Epstein's (2001) action teams. Many SCC participants voiced frustration as they talked about supporting the handed-down centralized goals of the *Learning Improvement*

Plan. It was not the goals per se with which the SCC members had a problem; rather, as some SCC members stated, it was the way in which these goals were created. Perhaps if SCC members had more of an influence in creating their own goals, they may have been more intricately involved with community involvement in ways they deemed as important. Both Rideout's (1995) work and social capital theory support the notion that school councils need to be given some form of decentralized authority in order to be truly effective. As Rideout stated, in order for school councils to be effective, they need to be freed from their "advisory strait jacket" (p. 13) and given higher levels of local decision-making power. The perceptions of many of my participants are in line with Rideout's suggestions.

As supported by Ferrary (2002), promoting internal flexibility within organizations enables the accumulation and optimization of local stocks of social capital. Furthermore, allowing organizations (such as SCCs) to determine their own goals is associated with increasing levels of trust between members of an organization (Watson & Papamarcos, 2002) and creating higher levels of group incentive (Rob & Zemsky, 2002) and increasing group productivity (Halpern, 2005). Thus, as indicated above, had the SCC been given more latitude in forming and following SCC goals, its influence upon the school community may have increased. Also, focusing time on creating SCC goals can be viewed as an integral part of reinforcing the SCC's purpose because in doing so, the organization would likely uncover group values. As articulated through Putnam's (2000) social capital claims, common goals establish expectations for an association and are the backdrop to determining group norms and standards.

A noticeable variation between Epstein's (2001) and Kerr's (2005) research on action teams/school councils and my SCC research is that Sunshine's SCC had been in existence for about two years. Epstein stated that three years is needed before constructive results can be documented from action teams. Kerr purported that with time and experience, school councils evolve through chronological stages of growth. In Kerr's early developmental stages, a school council predominantly focuses on traditional forms of community involvement. School councils gradually progress through more advanced stages of development, where school council members increasingly collaborate with school staff to improve student learning and generate community involvement in the school. In this light, the results of this study cannot fairly be compared to Epstein's and Kerr's research because, as stated above, this research took place during Sunshine's SCC's first two years of existence.

Bonding, Bridging, and Linking Social Capital and SCCs

Social capital is commonly divided into three main forms: bonding, bridging, and linking social capital. Herein, I review each type of social capital and discuss how the relevancy of bonding, bridging, and linking social capital is connected to the idea that the SCC's influence on community involvement in school was evolving.

Bonding and Bridging Social Capital. Bonding social capital pertains to close social connections characterized within relationships between family members, close friends, ethnic groups, and religious groups (Hall, 2007; Pelling & High, 2005; Putnam, 2000). Bonding social capital bolsters inclusive views and homogeneous groupings. The existence of thick trust between individuals is a common characteristic of bonding social capital. Briggs (2004) indicated that bonding social capital is a useful resource for

“getting by” in life (p. 3). The assistance received from family and close friends in times of illness or crisis is an example of bonding social capital in action. In contrast, bridging social capital is typified within social networks that have contrasting personal and professional identities but nevertheless share a common interest or goal (Dodds & Lilley, 2008; Pelling & High, 2005).

As compared to bonding social capital, bridging social capital is characterized by broader, more distant social connections (Putnam, 2000). Bridging social capital often unites people from different communities, cultures, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Additionally, bridging social capital may or may not incorporate aspects of thin and thick trust. Briggs (2004) viewed bridging social capital as a key resource for “getting ahead” in life (p. 3). In summary, whereas bonding social capital enables personal survival and preserves tradition, bridging social capital promotes personal and professional advancement, growth, and innovation.

Upon initial analysis, it appeared elected SCC members did not share bonding social capital before assuming SCC membership. For example, members did not personally know each other, and they did not appear to share pre-established or close friendships with each other. Although SCC members did not initially appear to exhibit bonding social capital as such, the organization reflected bonding social capital in some distinctive ways. In terms of background and culture, the SCC was a homogeneous group of individuals. All elected SCC members were White, middle-aged, middle class, English-speaking, professional women with children attending Sunshine School. In such ways, the SCC possessed some characteristics bonding social capital.

The SCC also displayed aspects of bridging social capital. As highlighted in the interviews and during SCC meetings, SCC members represented a number of different professional backgrounds. Partially due to professionally-diverse backgrounds, SCC members possessed assorted views on some topics and often brought to meetings a variety of ideas regarding how to impact community involvement in school. Group divergence in such a manner is a positive thing because over time heterogeneous groupings utilizing bridging social capital are more productive than homogenous groups that reflect bonding social capital (Beebe & Masterson, 2009; Halpern, 2005; Putnam, 2000).

Upon continued analysis of the above information, a question arises. Did elected SCC members predominantly possess bonding social capital or bridging social capital? Putnam (2000) explained that bonding and bridging social capital are not necessarily an either-or category. Instead, he suggested that bonding and bridging social capital are approximate dimensions that compare forms of social capital. He stated, “I have found no reliable, comprehensive, nationwide measures of social capital that neatly distinguish ‘bridgingness’ and ‘bondingness’” (pp. 23–24). Sunshine’s SCC members were connected in terms of similar socioeconomic status, gender, age, culture, and language, which predisposed them to share a fair amount of bonding social capital; however, they also shared bridging social capital because they represented different professions and had little to no social connections before assuming SCC membership. Thus, if members shared both bonding and bridging social capital, in theory, they were ideally positioned to quite substantially affect community involvement in school; yet, this study highlighted

that the SCC's influence on community involvement in school was evolving. What is the reason behind this misalignment of theory and practice?

Perhaps, an additional idea as to why, during the time of this study, Sunshine's SCC had a limited impact on community involvement does not wholly lie within an analysis of the bonding and bridging social capital dynamics of the SCC. Rather, an additional aspect of the SCC's impact on community involvement is highlighted when contrasting the SCC policy directives of community involvement with participants' perceptions of community involvement. The SCC policy stipulated SCCs needed to link school improvement goals with community involvement. In contrast, as indicated within the data, participants perceived community involvement to encompass a much broader domain. Participants believed that in order to enhance community involvement, community leaders (e.g., SCC members) need to welcome, involve, and value all contributors and welcome various forms of social capital. Participants indirectly emphasized that community involvement means valuing all types of personal (bonding social capital), professional (bridging social capital), and organizational (linking social capital) potentials within the school community. Thus, having an SCC that embodied bonding and bridging social capital was merely the start to increasing community involvement with the school. The next step toward generating increased community involvement in school was involving the SCC members by using their bonding and bridging social capital as leverage to acquire and utilize other types of bonding, bridging, and linking social capital prominent within the school community. Otherwise stated, an SCC that recognized and then utilized its likenesses (bonding social capital) and

differences (bridging social capital) is ideally positioned to create a group synergy, which would likely positively influence community involvement in school.

Linking Social Capital. In addition to bonding and bridging social capital, SCC members had opportunities to access and utilize sources of linking social capital. As mentioned in chapter 2, linking social capital connects individuals or groups of people with persons of influence or prominent organizations (Hall, 2007). An example of linking social capital is an individual who utilizes an employment agency to help secure a job. In the case of SCCs, another example of linking capital would be an SCC member's professional contact with a prominent organization such as the Saskatchewan Ministry of Education to help achieve SCC goals. Linking social capital has the potential to allow people of less influence to acquire resources, ideas, and knowledge from centralized organizations and/or institutionalized departments or associations (Dodds & Lilley, 2008).

Individual SCC members possessed professional forms of linking social capital. For example, one SCC member worked for a provincial agency, and another SCC member was the co-founder of a professional company. However, Sunshine's SCC did not appear to openly utilize this linking social capital potential. Why? As Dodds and Lilley (2008) indicated, in order to enable linking social capital, people of different power and status need to unite. In turn, complex hierarchal relationships or "vertical networks" (Putnam, 1993, p. 174) are formed. As applied to Sunshine's SCC, capitalizing on an SCC member's linking social capital may have somewhat divided the group. Putnam stated that vertical (or hierarchical) relationships are generally unable to sustain social trust and cooperation. Perhaps individual SCC members were not inclined

to facilitate the exchange of their linking social capital because they did not want to dominate the SCC's agenda? Or, perhaps because the school improvement goals were so specific, SCC member's linking social capital did not correspond to the SCC's mandate. Regardless of the reason, in order to overcome power differentials that may arise when utilizing linking social capital, members within an organization need to possess high levels of trust, and, as stated previously, Sunshine's SCC members appeared to be developing strong trusting relationships between them.

Another source of linking social capital is reflected through professional development opportunities. Exemplified within the data, several SCC members indicated they were thankful for the professional development their school division provided them; some SCC members indicated they wanted additional training. At one particular SCC meeting, I witnessed two members volunteering to attend a future conference pertinent to SCC needs. Interestingly, however, when interviewing SCC participants, they made no reference to how or if these sources of linking social capital helped promote community involvement in their school. Perhaps one reason why Sunshine's SCC did not appear to fully exploit their linking social capital sources was because professional development information received from linking social capital agencies was not fully debriefed to all SCC members. For example, in order to capitalize on the potential of linking social capital, after returning from a professional development experience, SCC members need to fully disseminate the information to other SCC members. In light of this example, the topic of fluid SCC communication comes into play. In order to utilize linking social capital SCC members need to communicate with each other and members of the school community. As the data indicated, SCC members perceived that their association could

improve on its communicative efforts with the school community. Further exploiting this idea, perhaps SCC members need to improve communication within the association, as well.

Another tentative reason why the linking social capital appeared to be somewhat dormant or under-utilized is exemplified within Krishnamoorthi's (2000) research on school councils. He claimed school council professional resources (linking social capital) must be more than "reading a bunch of slides" (p. 304). Quality SCC training needs to possess flexible time schedules, expose multiple educative issues, and be hospitable to socioeconomic and ESL needs (Boylan, 2005; Krishnamoorthi, 2000). That is, quality school council training needs to be considerate of the bonding and bridging social capital realities of individual communities. For example, whether SCC members represent an agriculturally-based rural community, a remote Northern Saskatchewan Aboriginal community, or an inner city community will influence what type of linking social capital will be relevant for the SCC. Ella and Lilly were two SCC participants who commented that they would have liked additional professional training opportunities that they perceived ideally suited the contextualized needs of their SCC. According to concepts of linking social capital, the provision of quality professional development resources for SCC members may have had a positive influence on the SCC's ability to influence community involvement in school.

Community Involvement Nourishes Social Cohesion

In reviewing the data for the second research question, most participants perceived that traditional forms of community involvement in school positively impacted the social cohesion of the school community. Several participants believed community

involvement in school increased the quality and quantity of parent-parent, parent-teacher, and school-community relationships. In relation to these findings, several key questions arise. How can social capital be used to assist in explaining these data? How does the socialization of educators, parents, and community members affect the amount and type of social capital that exist within the community? How does the social capital that is available within the community affect the school experience of students? How does past research relate to these findings?

The Effect of Socialization

In reviewing the data, most participants described attending school concerts, supporting fundraising activities, and volunteering for school-related activities as socially-interactive forms of community involvement. Some participants believed their attendance at such events symbolized their pride for their school, which, in turn, created stronger social cohesion among community members. Some participants explained that socialization within the community created stronger relationships between parents and between parents and school agents.

Utilizing social capital theory, a similar message is reiterated: socialization creates social capital, which supports community involvement. By its very nature, traditional forms of community involvement in school have the potential to be highly social functions. Halpern (2005) claimed that the most straightforward way to build local forms of social capital is to interact with people while participating in community events. His examples of such socially-rich community participation include: (a) going out and meeting neighbors, (b) fundraising, (c) volunteering, (d) socializing with parents of children at school, (e) increasing parent-school interaction, (f) providing leadership for

children's extracurricular activities, (g) creating a common email list facilitating communication, and (h) upgrading local parks and play areas. Putnam (2000) claimed, "Fundraising typically means friend-raising" (p. 121). In Putnam and Halpern's views, repeated social interactions with fellow citizens during a variety of community events reinforce and create stocks of social capital within a community. Further research suggests that building such trusting relationships (social capital) between and among people is the basis for promoting future involvement in both community and school life (Noguera, 2001; Putnam, 1995a; Shirley, 1997; Warren, Thompson, & Saegert, 2001). The connection between socialization, social capital, and community involvement in school is illustrated through *Figure 3* below.

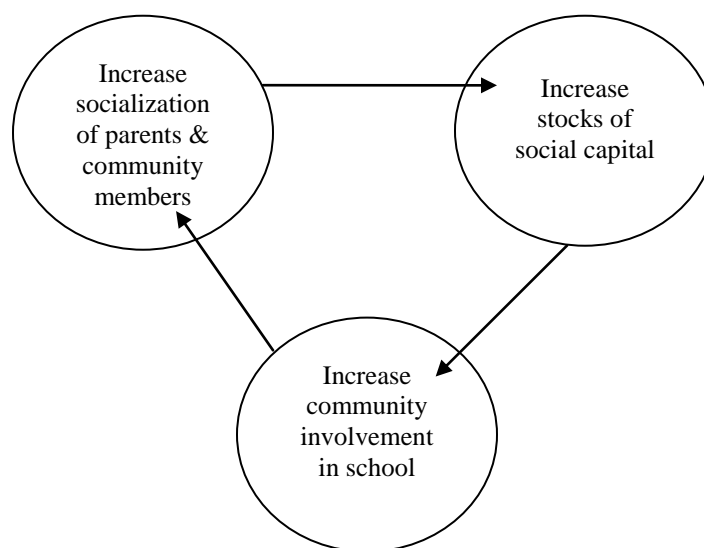


Figure 3. The connection between socialization, social capital, and community involvement.

As related to this study, the vast majority of participants believed supporting traditional forms of community involvement in school was important. As indicated above, such involvement is associated with nourishing stronger communal relationships,

which, in turn has the potential to positively influence greater community involvement in the future. In this way, the value many participants placed on traditional forms of community involvement had merit because it was the foundation for enriching social capital and school-community relationships.

Traditional Community Involvement Non-intimidating for Parents

Another positive aspect of promoting traditional forms of community involvement in the school is that it has the potential to increase the social comfort levels between parents and community members and school staff members. The work of Kugler and Flessa (2007) and Peterson and Ladky (2007) highlighted that some parents avoid close parent-teacher collaboration because they do not believe they possess the specialized knowledge valued by the school professionals. In addition, parents who have had negative school experiences sometimes view their child's teacher and school environment as intimidating (Barnes, Josefowitz, & Cole, 2006; Berger, 2008; Kugler & Flessa, 2007; Peterson & Ladky, 2007; Rätty, 2003).

In line with the above explanation, most participants of this study perceived the simple acts of attending school-sponsored events and volunteering for school functions as nonthreatening. Before parents and community members can effectively assume the roles of school advisors and teacher collaborators, they need to feel welcomed and comfortable in their child's school culture. In such an emotionally salubrious environment, parents and community members can more easily build trusting relationships with school professionals and other parents and community members. As a part of this relationship-building, parents and community members have greater potential

to develop and utilize bonding and bridging social capital with school professionals and other community members, which is highly valuable toward advancing home-school collaboration and communication.

Although not specifically reinforced through this study, research also indicates that parent support of traditional community involvement in school may also yield career support for students. For some parents, attending a school event is the first time they enter their child's school. This first step into the school often serves to acquaint parents with the school principal, staff members, and the school's physical orientation. Warren, Hong, Rubin, and Uy (2009) believed that parents who are comfortable and familiar with their child's school are more likely to access the school's human resources. Warren et al. explained that human resources (such as school counselors, advice for school programs, career development consultations, and college admission information) are quite specialized. Pre-existing social relationships between parents and school agents becomes a precious asset for parents who want to support their children (Warren et al., 2009). In this way, investment toward securing traditional social networks within school environments can be beneficial toward supporting the future success of students, especially those students who have limited social, human, and financial social capital (Bourdieu, 2001, 2002; Coleman, 1988; Teachman, 1987).

Influencing Student Performance

For years researchers have spent much time and effort describing visible and invisible types of community involvement in schools (e.g., Berger, 1991; Garcia, 2004; Epstein, 2005; Lopez, 2001; McClure, 1993; Roffey, 2002), and, for years, the term *parent and community members as supporters* has been directly and indirectly

recognized, by the same authors as a lower stratum of community involvement. For the most part, within the past decade, Canadian policymakers have not focused efforts on enhancing parents and community members as supporters of traditional school events. Rather, policymakers have emphasized the importance of parent and community involvement in school council roles (Preston, 2008a), and policymakers have underscored a need for enhanced school-parent collaboration. The recent creation and deployment of a number of major educational policies reinforce this point. For example, the SCC policy in Saskatchewan (Saskatchewan Learning, 2005), the *Alberta Initiative for School Improvement*, (Alberta Education, 2008), and *Parent Voice in Education Project* in Ontario (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2005) reinforce the importance of having parents and community members assume quasi-professional roles through school council and/or highlight the importance of nurturing teacher-parents relationships. The undergirding mandate of such policies is to increase the parent and community presence in schools in an attempt to positively affect the academic success and social wellbeing of students.

Indeed, it has been clearly demonstrated that parent involvement in school has numerous benefits on student performance (Darch et al., 2004; Epstein, 2001; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Hiatt-Michael, 2001; Levine & Lezotte, 1995); however, based on the views of most of my participants, based on a review of the SCC policy, and supported by the ideologies of social capital theory, traditional forms of community involvement appear to be undervalued within many school communities. My research highlighted that the majority of the participants believed in the importance of traditional forms of community involvement in school. In line with social capital theory, such an idea is not only a logical approach to increasing community involvement, but may be necessary for

creating solid, trusting relationships essential for attaining increased social cohesion and social capital within the school community.

Social capital research indicates that students who live in a community that exhibits high levels of social capital do better academically than students living in a community with lower levels of social capital. Research conducted by Bryk and Schneider (2002), Coleman (1988), and Halpern (2005) spotlighted a number of small schools and Catholic schools within the United States, which performed well on national tests. They demonstrated that the academic achievement of these students was dependent upon the high levels of social capital exemplified through tight parent-school relationships and parent-parent relationships within the schools communities. In these schools, teachers, parents, and community members knew each other well and displayed aspects of strong social relationships.

In relation to my study, Sunshine's SCC focused limited attention on promoting family- and community-centered forms of traditional community involvement, even though many SCC members voiced their desire to do so. According to social capital theory, SCC members may have directly and indirectly supported the academic and social wellbeing of students had they focused their efforts on promoting traditional forms of community involvement in school, as many members wanted to.

Reviewing the Philosophy of a Community School

As indicated within chapter 2, community schools are educational facilities that provide enriched academic and recreational opportunities, as well as health and social services for students and parents and community members. Tymchak (2001a) recommended that a community school philosophy be adopted for all public schools

within Saskatchewan. Dryfoos (1999) explained that some American schools are also following a similar trend to implement community school programs, which often include onsite childcare, tutoring/extra classes, and recreational activities for both students and adults from the community. Using a social capital analysis of community schools, the events and activities promoted within these schools facilitate the social interaction of teachers, parents, and community members. As indicated above, such interactions nurture and embellish stocks of social capital present within the school community.

Sunshine School was not a community school. In line with this point, the specific activities and programs the SCC appeared to promote did not reflect those commonly present within a community school. For example, through participant interviews and my field observations, the SCC did not appear to promote community usage of the school facility for recreational, personal, or academic reasons. The SCC did not appear to sponsor, organize, or assist in such things as daycare, preschool, before- and after-school childcare, a breakfast/lunch program, adult education classes, or community healthcare facilities within the school. Overall, the SCC's influence did not appear to affect programs and events typically associated within community schools.

With that said, some participants articulated their belief that the Sunshine School should open its facility for community use and betterment. As well, some participants indicated that utilizing the personal (bonding social capital) and professional skills (bridging social capital) of community members was a financially sound way to improve the school's physical environment. Tanya indicated that both the school and the community receive reciprocal benefit when a school promotes activities such as those commonly found in community schools. In this way, many participants supported

aspects of the community school philosophy. If the SCC had been more liberated to advocate activities and programs commonly associated with community schools, the SCC may have strengthened stocks of social capital within the community while positively influencing community involvement and its reciprocal benefits.

The Misalignment of Tradition and Policy

The data for the second research question highlighted that some participants perceived the SCC policy to be misaligned with the participants' ideas about ideal forms of community involvement. Most SCC participants were frustrated with the bureaucracy that they perceived was embedded within the SCC policy. Also, most teachers and community members interviewed appeared uninterested in having the SCC influence curricular decisions. While analyzing these results, several questions surface. What aspects of social capital theory help to explain SCC frustration with the SCC policy? What is the relationship between bureaucracy and organizational trust? Upon a closer look at the SCC policy, in what ways was the policy misaligned with participant beliefs? Did SCC membership realistically represent the intention of the SCC policy? What does past research highlight about school councils and their influence in the school? How can social capital be employed to assist in analyzing the productivity of school councils?

The Challenge of Bureaucracy

SCC participants perceived that adhering to the formal, time-consuming aspects of the SCC policy prevented them from promoting community involvement in the school in the way they wanted. For example, the SCC policy required SCC members to write a formal constitution and to support the school's *Learning Improvement Plan*. The majority of SCC participants were frustrated because they believed that fulfilling the

educational mandates dictated by the school division and Ministry of Education consumed their volunteer time. Many participants also commented that they were comfortable with promoting less formal aspects of community involvement, such as parent volunteerism in school and parent information nights.

Social capital research provides a deeper consideration as to why participants felt frustrated. As mentioned previously, the formalities of the SCC policy devalued the creation and utilization of trust and social networks among Sunshine's SCC members. As highlighted by Fukuyama (1996), there is an inverse relationship between bureaucratic rules and interpersonal trust. The more an organization or group of people relies/rely on outside rules to regulate their social interactions, the less they are required to trust each other. Moreover, adhering to strict policy procedures and rules negate the need for members to rely on their own problem solving skills (Halpern, 2005). In such controlled circumstances, an organization is less likely to either generate group initiatives or produce group synergy.

As applied to Sunshine's SCC, participants recognized that the bureaucratic directives of the SCC policy negatively affected the SCC members' ability to promote community involvement on their terms. The application of social capital theory infers that if SCC members felt they had more control over what their association did and how they wanted to achieve their goals, members would have possessed greater incentive to tap into their community's stocks of social capital (Rob & Zemsky, 2002). Most SCC participants stated that they had not joined the SCC to assume formal responsibilities such as writing a constitution or playing politics. Nevertheless, SCC participants complied with policy protocol and supported the school improvement goals. With that

said, through my interpretation of data, I did not recognize that SCC members felt a sense of accomplishment in supporting the *Learning Improvement Plan*. Perhaps this perceived lack of overt SCC member pride was attributable to the fact that the SCC policy did not encourage members to assume ownership and responsibility of self-identified tasks, which Dodds and Lilley (2008) believed initiates an incentive to explore bonding, bridging, and linking social capital revenues.

Bourdieu's (2001) work also supports the theory that there exists an inverse relationship between social capital and bureaucratic policy. He explained that social capital is linked to the creation of exclusive social networks within institutionalized organizations. He continued by explaining these exclusive social networks are exacerbated when they are directed by high levels of bureaucracy. Weber (1967) emphasized that not everyone has the aptitude and skill needed to work in bureaucratic environments. As such, people possessing high levels of human capital predominantly staff formal organizations. Evans (1996) highlighted that membership in political or formal organizations often encourages the social polarization of lower and higher socioeconomic classes. In this light, Evans claimed bureaucracy is an enemy of social capital. Preston and Stelmach's (2008) research found that principals feared that the educational jargon and formalities permeating the SCC policy might detract participation from the marginalized or divergent populations of the school community.

With regard to the topic of bureaucracy, my research mirrored concerns somewhat similar to those highlighted above. For example, Sunshine's elected SCC members were a homogenous group of females and did not represent the diverse ethnic groups of Sunshine's pocket communities. One participant recognized that the membership of the

SCC could be perceived by some community members as rather elitist and somewhat exclusive for the general public. Because the demographics of Sunshine's SCC were so gender specific (female) and represented members of a similar socioeconomic group, the organization had the potential to activate negative aspects of bonding social capital. That is, the homogeneous representation of SCC members may be perceived to be unwelcoming to outside members who exhibit cultural, linguistic, socioeconomic, or ethnic divergence as compared to the homogeneous SCC group.

A description of horizontal and vertical linking agents adds a further dimension to the topic of the SCC and its perceived bureaucracy. Putnam (1993) recognized that various organizations naturally incorporate horizontal and vertical linking agents. Horizontal linking agents unite people of similar status and power. Examples of horizontal linking agents include sports clubs, church groups, and school councils. Both bridging and bonding social capital often exist in horizontal linking organizations. Putnam believed horizontal linking agents are the building blocks needed to form new stocks of social capital within a community. Szreter and Woolcock (2004) believed that grassroots face-to-face involvement through horizontal linking agents leads to the production of active and rich social capital, which positively influences community wellbeing. In opposition, vertical linking agents connect people through hierarchical relationships and contain less potential for building social capital (Boix & Posner, 1996). An example of a vertical linking agent is a relationship between a business owner and a one-time customer. Vertical relationships have a limited ability to generate norms of reciprocity, social trust, or a collective sense of responsibility between individuals. For

these reasons, vertical linking organizations predominantly offer low social capital-building power.

Sunshine's SCC was a horizontal linking agency. In theory, this community organization was an excellent *playground* for the social capital it embodied (Putnam, 1993). Nevertheless, one of the reasons the social capital of Sunshine SCC appeared to be somewhat disabled is because it was highly influenced by formal policy, which is affiliated with vertical linking agents. The legislated responsibilities of the SCC policy may have truncated the SCC members' enthusiasm and devotion to the cause, negatively affecting the flow of social capital between members.

The formalities of the policy were the cause for additional concerns. As McBride (1998) stated, volunteer organizations that are perceived to make undue demands on its members without providing clearly demonstrable benefits are unlikely to sustain or gain membership within their association. Through its mandate to contribute to the *Learning Improvement Plan*, the SCC policy placed specialized, academic demands upon SCC members, with which most SCC members were uncomfortable. In fact, one participant explained that had she known about the formal academic responsibilities of the SCC, she probably would not have joined the association.

Reviewing Popular Rationales Undergirding Educational Policies

School governance policies are infused with terminology such as *accountability*, *school-based planning*, and *site-based management*. Policymakers using such language believe that in order to augment positive school experience and to increase student performance, parents, who are naturally closest to students, need to be influential constituents within the school improvement cycle. Decentralized school governance is

considered to endow a school community with more local responsibility for deliverance of quality education to its youth. For this reason, Endsine and Melvin (n.d.) recognized an SCC as “an essential feature of educational planning and decision-making” (p. 3).

Most SCC participants acknowledged that they were accountable to the school, school division, and SCC policy, through their support to the school’s *Learning Improvement Plan*. SCC accountability was also apparent when the SCC handed in its annual report to the school board. This written report formally communicated to the school division the SCC’s plans, expenditures, and timeframes for initiation and completion of programs (Saskatchewan Learning, 2005). Through the SCC members’ support for the *Learning Improvement Plan* and through the SCC annual report, the SCC with educators *appeared* to transparently co-create objectives aimed at increasing student wellbeing and learning.

Fullan and Quinn (1996) believed that if a school council simply *complies* with policy requirements, its effectiveness is questionable. The results of my research reflected Fullan and Quinn’s (1996) concerns. As described through the experience of SCC members, the reality of the SCC policy and the *Learning Improvement Plan* was that educators and school officials determined school objectives and merely handed down these goals to the SCC for stamp-approval. SCC members did not appear to participate in determining the school goals. In my analysis of the data, SCC members did not view themselves as an authentic decentralized advisory body, and, it was in this way, SCC members debunked the SCC policy. Ironically, adhering to the SCC policy mandate may have made SCC members feel less personally accountable for the educational experience of local students because SCC members had little authority to affect school in the way

they wanted to. As highlighted previously, the directives of the policy counteracted the SCC members' ability to form thick trust between its members and offset an SCC initiative to utilize the dormant stocks of social capital existing within the school community.

In addition to the notion that school councils need to be transparent and accountable, the research highlights that, ideally, schools councils reflect components of Western participatory democracy. Democracy emphasizes cooperation among people, caring for the common good, and allowing an opportunity for all people to voice opinions (Apple & Beane, 1995). The tenets of democracy include an election process *of* the people, *by* the people, and *for* the people. Juxtaposed with this description, SCCs are elected representatives *of* the school community, elected *by* the school community, and elected *for* the school community. In turn, as Endsien and Melvin (n.d.) stated, "School Community Councils engage in processes to ensure all voices of the school community are heard and all perspectives are taken into account" (p. 8).

Although Sunshine's SCC members were elected representatives of the community, this criterion alone did not ensure that all voices of the community were acknowledged and represented. As reflected in this study, the elected SCC members did not represent the diversity of gender, cultural, religion, and socioeconomic statuses existing within the community. Sunshine School's elected SCC members were White, middle-aged, professional mothers, and Sunshine's populace was more socioeconomically, ethnically, and culturally diverse than was displayed through SCC representation. In contrast to the ideal descriptors of the SCC policy, Sunshine's SCC group represented a selective homogeneous portion of the school community. In such a

manner, Sunshine's SCC did not reflect high amounts of bridging social capital, and it exemplified negative bonding social capital through its inclusive membership representation.

Ideologies of Community Linked to Social Relationships

The final research question was: how do social relationships impact the amount and type of community involvement that is reflected within the school community? The thematic answer to this question was that social relationships were precursors to community involvement in the participants' bedroom community. This point evolved through the participants' definitions and descriptions of community. More specifically, many participants highlighted the importance of interdependency and reciprocity when describing characteristics of strong communities. In line with this belief, how do concepts of interdependency and reciprocity activate social capital and therein create strong communities? Many participants also identified children and sports as relationship-builders, which, they believed, promoted community involvement. In line with this finding, how does the presence of children affect the number and type of social relationships that exist within a community? How does not having children affect an individual's social capital? Participants also described a number of characteristics of the greater community of Sunshine that they believed negatively influenced the strength of their community. Utilizing concepts of social capital theory, how does the existence of pocket communities, the town's proximity to the city, the effects of immigration, and the generational shift of values and lifestyle affect the quality and quantity of social relationships present within the community?

Community and Social Capital

Many scholars (e.g., Fukuyama, 1996, 1999; Putnam, 1993, 1995a, 1995b; 2000; Woolcock, 1998) denote that social networks have great potential to provide a variety of opportunities and benefits for people and communities. For example, Fukuyama (1996, 1999) connected bonding social capital with the economic success of Chinese and Japanese societies. For other scholars (e.g., Putnam, 1993, 1995a, 1995b, 2000; Woolcock, 1998), social capital is a public good, and the social networking of people enhances the safety and overall wellness of a society. Many aspects of these social capital claims resonate within participants' comments about social connections and strong communities. As highlighted in the data, one participant viewed the tight social networks of a Hutterite community increased the community's internal efficiencies and economic outcomes. This participant's perception is in line with Fukuyama's (1996, 1999) views that financial opportunity lay within active stocks of bonding social capital. Another participant voiced her belief that a healthy community is one that supports the wellbeing of its citizens. This perspective is in line with Putnam (1993, 1995a, 1995b, 2000) and Woolcock's (1998) ideas. Interestingly, although participants did not talk about the benefits of social capital per se, their descriptions of strong communities mirror concepts of social capital theory as described by social capital scholars.

As participants talked about community involvement, they also presented their beliefs that community involvement had reciprocity benefits. Most participants broadly defined community as a group of people who care for each other, share similar goals, live in proximity to each other, and profit from communal and individual relationships. Most

participants believed a strong community both *possesses* and *processes* social, emotional, economic, and spiritual potential for its citizenry.

In turn, social capital theory emphasizes that vibrant communities display generalized reciprocity among its citizens (Putnam, 2000). Taylor (1984) described a relationship comprised of generalized reciprocity as one that includes short term altruism and long term self-interest. For example, when one member of a community helps another member, this assistance is coupled with the uncertain expectation from the first member that a comparable favor will be returned to him/her sometime in the future. The existence of this *indebted* state of being can be highly influential toward keeping social relationships open, active, and reciprocal. As such, generalized reciprocity is a productive facet of social capital. Nicholson and Hoyer (2008) agreed that reciprocity is an important feature of social networks because it encourages members within a community to produce and access resources.

Many comments from participants mirrored the concept of generalized reciprocity. As reflected previously in the data, one participant stated, “What you give comes back.” Another participant said that when you offer something of yourself to others, you will get something in return. A third participant indicated that she needed to give to the school because the school gave so much to her children. In such ways, participants valued the idea of generalized reciprocity and believed it contributed to the overall health of their community.

The Impact of Children and Sports on Social Capital

Many participants pointed out that children proved to be extremely influential in strengthening their community because they perceived that children and family networks

offered bountiful opportunities to meet and interact with other people. Research reinforces the idea that children have vast social capital potential specifically for parents. Small (2009) highlighted that parents who sent their children to daycare dramatically expanded the size and usefulness of their personal networks through connections created through daycare. In this way, children acted as a sort of social capital broker for their parents who sent their children to childcare centers. In my study, many participants recognized that children were the catalyst that caused parents to meet and interact with parents of the community. As indicated in chapter 4, one participant stated, “Your kids open up a lot of doors.” Another participant explained that it was not until she had children and began to take them to community events that she began to feel accepted by community members. Thus, this study highlighted that the interests of children united parents and created stronger parent-to-parent relationships.

Burt (1992) and Papachristos (2006) used the notion of *structural holes* to explain the aspect of latent social capital. As identified in chapter 2, these authors defined the absence of social capital between two parties as a structural hole. More simply stated, a structural hole is the absence of a social relationship or social connection. In the lived experiences of my participants, the interests of children created and enhanced social networks between parents. As reflected through social capital theory and in my research, children have/had the potential to close social structural holes within a school community.

In addition to children, participants talked about the effect of sports as it pertained to community involvement and relationship-building. Crabbe (2008) claimed that not only do sports have vast potential to create employment, generate income, and improve

health, sports bring people together. Research conducted by Fritch (1999) and Kay and Bradbury (2009) concluded that, in particular, children's sporting events have strong tendencies to create and strengthen social capital among parents. Doherty and Misener (2008) described community sport organizations as "substantial fixtures in our [Canadian] communities" (p. 114). They continued by explaining that networks, volunteers, and community stakeholders involved with community sport organizations are important sources of social capital. Social networks that develop based on sports (e.g., board memberships, team players and spectators) are often a group of people with similar values and interests. For this reason, community sporting events tend to serve as rich sites of bonding social capital.

Most participants claimed that sports were highly influential in socially uniting community members. With that stated, many participants recognized that the bonding social capital, which evolved within sports networks, often displayed exclusionary practices. Some participants believed sporting events were overemphasized and overrepresented throughout the community. These participants claimed it was unfortunate that sports appeared to be the epitome of Sunshine's community involvement because not all community members were sports-minded. Only two participants believed the attention that the community placed on sports was a reality of modern-day life and was not a serious issue.

Doherty (2005) claimed that the tight social groups representing sporting interests are often inaccessible to certain groups of individuals, including senior citizens, women, and those not in the labor force. In such cases, negative social capital is at work, which leads to the exclusion of outsiders. Halpern (2005) stated that social capital is "often ...

expressed as a ‘club good’ that provide advantages only to those who have access to it” (p. 285). In tight sports networks, homogeneous attitudes and behaviors flourish, which further exacerbates the social exclusion of nonathletic people. Even though most participants recognized the social exclusionary practices generated through sports, they did not provide answers of how to address the issue.

Interestingly, when participants indicated that sporting events united community members, they often specified that these sports events were outside the authority of the school and included such things as children’s hockey leagues, dance recitals, and adult sporting events. Conversely, when participants talked about traditional forms of community involvement in school their descriptions were not limited to sporting activities. For example, participants suggested that the school utilize community knowledge (bonding, bridging, and linking social capital) to welcome an array of guest speaker topics. They talked about the importance of fundraising, which even if it is for a sporting event, is a social activity that welcomes contributions from all community members, regardless of their athletic tendencies. Participants talked about community members attending Christmas concerts, drama nights, and Art shows. In such a way, the SCC members supporting traditional involvement in school is highly important because it has the potential to compensate for the negative social capital that may evolve from sport affiliation that parents appeared to share with each other outside of the school.

Sunshine’s Bedroom Community and Social Capital

Even though participants held strong views on what community meant, they were concerned that their bedroom community was mismatched with their ideal concepts of community. For instance, participants explained that the professional jobs and city-

commuting tendencies of many community members limited the amount of time these citizens could give to community initiatives. Social capital scholars have asserted that the accumulation of social capital becomes restricted when people do not have time to interact spontaneously (Halpern 2005, Poulsen & Tinggaard Svendsen, 2005; Putnam 2000). In turn, stocks of social capital did not accumulate, which disabled high levels of community involvement. Putnam claimed that time pressures, two-career families, residential mobility, suburbanization and sprawl, television, and the disruption of marriage and family ties is partially responsible for destroying social capital and negatively affecting community wellness.

Some participants believed that the latest generation of Sunshine's citizens valued an individualized lifestyle, which appeared to be in opposition to the more traditional communal outlook of some of Sunshine's established members. Participants linked aspects of their bedroom community with concepts of individualism, a social outlook stressing independence, autonomy, and self-reliance. The term *individualism* draws its roots from the French Revolution. At that time, individualism connoted the negative influence of individual rights upon the wellbeing of the French commonwealth (Oyserman, Coon, & Kemmelmeier 2002). During this historical period, French leaders feared the upsurge of individual rights because they thought that focusing on individualism would make the community "crumble away and be disconnected into the dust and powder of individuality" (Burke, 1950, p. 93). Interestingly, the participants in this research perceived individualistic tendencies of some of Sunshine's citizens in a somewhat similar fashion. Participants indicated that those community members who were highly motivated toward achieving personal goals and those community members

who valued personal time and isolation were not as involved with the community. In this way, community members with individualistic tendencies were perceived as the antithesis of social cohesion.

The perceived lack of social relationships between some community members in Sunshine is an indicator that a structural hole may exist. Such a structural hole has implications for Sunshine's SCC. In an effort to close such a structural hole, SCC members need to promote greater social interaction within its community. As Halpern (2005) stated, "The most straightforward way of building up social capital is to go out and invest in it directly" (p. 291). In order for the SCC to invest in the community's social capital, the SCC must first have the freedom granted through policy to address the issue and then identify it as a goal. Then through sponsoring activities that are inviting and open to all community members, the SCC can begin to nurture and/or create social relationships between SCC members, between community members and SCC members, and between community members. Social interaction in any form is an integral step to developing trust and social capital within Sunshine's populace.

Participants highlighted that a prominent characteristic of Sunshine's bedroom community was that the majority of school staff members did not live in the school community. Many participants believed the community lost socially and financially because of this point. From a social capital perspective, because teachers commuted to Sunshine School, they generally did not share strong stocks of bonding social capital with community members. Teachers from outside of the community were prone to hold different norms, values, and views than the local community members. For this reason, the relationship between community members and teachers was not as strong as would

have been expected if the teachers lived within the community. Without sharing stocks of bonding social capital, community members and teachers were more prone to misunderstand each other and communicate less frequently. Such characteristics demote community involvement. Applying this information to Sunshine's SCC means that it may need to place greater emphasis on supporting programs where teachers and community members regularly interact.

In contrast to the negative aspects of commuter-teachers, such teachers may also be able to improve the wellbeing of the community via the bridging social capital potential they bring into the community. Through bridging social capital, a community can take advantage of external knowledge, culture, and resources. A community with high levels of bridging social capital is more innovative and more resilient in times of change and/or distress (Auld, 2008). With those benefits stated, it is important to note that, in isolation, bridging social capital is inert. The mere presence of bridging ties between commuter-teachers and community members does not automatically increase community involvement unless the social ties between these two groups are tangible and embody mutual respect and trust. Weisinger and Salipante (2005) argued that a lack of shared experiences and relevant skills constrain the production and effects of bridging social capital. Thus, in order to process raw bridging social capital into functional bridging social capital, teachers and community members need to interact, socialize, and form social ties. As related to the SCC, the SCC needs to recognize the potential of harnessing close relationships with its teachers and work with teachers to access and utilize bridging social capital. During the time of my data collections, most of Sunshine School's teachers did not appear to know the SCC existed. An exchange of bridging

social capital between the SCC and teachers starts with communication and extends from there.

Also reflected in this study was the point that some participants recognized the diverse interests and identities of new community members to be harmful toward the social cohesion of Sunshine. Some participants explained that many new community members migrated from the city. These new members brought their urban cultural propensities to Sunshine, harming what some members viewed as the community's once core rural lifestyle. Daniel et al. (2003) stated, "Any community that has strong in-group trust (trust in specific people) and lacks generalized trust (general trust in human nature) might manifest negative social capital at the societal level" (§ 37). To better understand Daniel et al.'s statement, the concept of generalized trust needs to be further explored.

Generalized trust (not to be confused with generalized reciprocity) is the general level of trust a person extends to other members of a society. Generalized trust is demonstrated in the trusting attitude an individual extends toward people in the general neighborhood, toward a Member of Parliament, or toward the teller at the bank, for instance. In Sunshine's case, some established members displayed low levels of generalized trust, because they were suspicious of the social changes new people were bringing and/or could bring to their community. In this way, participants also exhibited characteristics of negative social capital. Hooghe (2007) explained that members of a community are more likely to exhibit generalized trust if the members of that community display a certain degree of resemblance. According to social capital theory, the varying norms and social cultures of new members were cause for the limited generalized trust that some community members exhibited toward new members of Sunshine.

Nonetheless, if the community of Sunshine wants to increase community involvement, established community members need to trust new people and employ bridging social capital as a means to bring about positive change. In such a way, Sunshine's community members can bring credence to Putnam's (2000) belief that generalized reciprocity is the touchstone of social capital (p. 134). The SCC can play an integral part in enriching the social networks between the new and established people living in Sunshine. Once again, social networks between people are predominantly strengthened through social contact and increased communication. If the SCC supports social events that are inviting for both new and established community members and if the SCC increases its communication with Sunshine's citizenry, trust between community members may result.

Chapter Summary

Within this chapter, I reiterated the point that the SCC's influence on community involvement in school was evolving. I explained that the SCC was a new association, and, in line with social capital theory, Sunshine's SCC needed time to develop trusting relationships both within the association and with community members. High levels of trust between SCC members are associated with increased communication, cooperation, and confidence, which in turn positively affect the innovation and productivity of the SCC pertaining to promoting community involvement in school.

Most participants perceived traditional forms of community involvement in school to positively impact the social cohesion of the school community. Parents perceived there to be multiple benefits associated with traditional forms of community involvement in school. Such benefits included improved parent-to-parent relationships,

improved school-home relationships, additional support for school curricula, and improved student performance in school. Based on the tenets of social capital theory, socialization during community events generates social capital between community members, which assists in further promoting increased levels of community involvement.

Participants perceived that the SCC policy was misaligned with traditional forms of community involvement. Bureaucratic aspects of the SCC policy negatively affected the establishment and utilization of trust and social capital within the school community. As well, the rationale undergirding the creation of many school governance policies often incorporates ideologies of local accountability and democracy; however, as exemplified through Sunshine's SCC, these idealistic components of school governance did not overtly transpire into the contextual reality of Sunshine's SCC.

Based on participant comments surrounding the final research question, aspects of interdependency and reciprocity activate social capital and therein create a strong prosperous community. Many participants identified children and sports as relationship-builders, which, in turn, support community involvement. Participants indicated their belief that the existence of pocket communities, the town's proximity to the city, immigration into the community, and the generational shift of values and lifestyle decreased the social capital of community members. This, in turn, negatively affected community involvement.

CHAPTER 6: IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Within this chapter, I provide a number of recommendations pertaining to school councils and community involvement in school. I also reiterate the significance of the research, reflect on the strengths and challenges of the research, and frame questions for future research. The chapter ends with a summary of the research and a short epilogue pertaining to my belief about the power of relationships.

Recommendations Arising from the Research

Based on the interpretations of the research data, I provide a number of recommendations with respect to Sunshine's SCC and its influence on community involvement in school. This commentary has broader implications in relations to Saskatchewan's SCC policy and contains practical recommendations for school divisions, schools, and SCCs.

Policy Considerations

SCCs do not have definitive control over the construction of their own goals. The SCC is predominantly able only to endorse and promote goals within the framework of the school's *Learning Improvement Plan*. This point is recognized by Saskatchewan Learning (2006) when it stated that any local goals set by the SCC need to align with divisional priorities:

School community councils...collaborate with the principal and school staff in the development of a local *Learning Improvement Plan* ... *The Learning Improvement Plan* will align with the divisional CI [Continuous Improvement] Plan and address divisional priorities while enabling local flexibility. (p. 19)

As indicated in the quote, goals created within the *Learning Improvement Plan* need to comply with the centralized educational platform (e.g., the *Continuous Improvement Plan*) as outlined by the provincial government. Based on this explanation, an SCC's involvement with the *Learning Improvement Plan* is not a highly decentralized act, but a localized validation of provincial priorities.

I recommend that amendments be made to the provincial *Continuous Improvement Framework* and the *Learning Improvement Plan* so that every SCC is empowered with decentralized authority. SCCs need to be freed from having to directly comply with the centralized goals of the province, the school division, and the school. Instead, SCCs need to create and pursue local goals they recognize as important for *their* community and *their* students.

The general purpose of the SCC is to meaningfully involve parent and community members in the school culture. In its written form, the SCC policy acknowledges that “the School Community Council is an integral, purposeful, and valued component” of school governance (Endsin & Melvin, n.d., p. 3). However, as highlighted in this study, the SCC's purpose and value were filtered through accountability measurements as outlined within the *Continuous Improvement Framework* and the *Learning Improvement Plan*. Such measurements ensured that parents and community members adhered to a focus on attainment of centralized educational goals. These provincially-mandated accountability tactics restricted parents and community members from addressing their local concerns.

The SCC policy is intended to authentically integrate the voice of parents and community members into school governance. In order to prevent the SCC policy from

turning into top-down rhetoric, school educators need to openly receive and utilize the ideas of parents and community members, regardless of whether their ideas are an accountable version of provincial mandates. Furthermore, having SCCs create self-determined goals have a multitude of benefits. The culture of a volunteer association that formulates its own local goals is more welcoming to parents and community members who are not familiar or comfortable with educational jargon and provincial mandates. Creating and pursuing self-generated SCC priorities produce a reliance on the skills and social capacities of group members. In turn, this membership dependence promotes communication and cooperation between and among SCC members and the school community. Freeing SCCs from having to comply with provincial mandates furnishes group synergy, productivity, and trust, all of which cultivate the formation and utilization of social capital. Furthermore, the success of attaining self-generated, community-focused goals fosters a sense of group pride. These outcomes create member competence, which is highly advantageous toward future productivity.

It should be noted that although many SCC participants disagreed with the aspect of the SCC policy that mandates them to support the *Learning Improvement Plan*, these SCC members did not object to the *Learning Improvement Plan* itself. Thus, my recommendation does not infer that the existence of *Learning Improvement Plan* needs reconsideration. Rather, what is in question is that the SCC policy dictates that SCC foci are predetermined by the province and school division. If parents/community members are to become legitimate partners with the school personnel, school agents must allow parents and community members the freedom to talk openly about their concerns and desires, regardless of provincial or school mandates. As a final point, the SCC is a

volunteer organization. In order to maintain membership in volunteer organizations, members need to be fueled by goals that are pertinent to them. Allowing volunteer SCC members to determine their focus may positively influence the length and productivity of SCC membership.

Another aspect of promoting decentralized authority means ensuring that all SCC members understand the purpose of the SCC. In an effort to do so, a comprehensive orientation should be provided for all incoming members. Such training could include information about how to promote effective communication among volunteer members, an explanation of SCC decision-making procedures, an explanation of the SCC constitution, the deciphering of educational terminologies, and guidance on how to constructively deal with potential organizational challenges. The attainment of SCC goals is directly associated with the front-end training supplied to new members.

A specific component of the SCC policy outlines that SCC members limit their time and attention on fundraising activities. More specifically, as dictated in the policy, the SCC cannot directly sponsor fundraising activities unless it officially establishes a separate committee. “Because fundraising typically means friend-raising,” (Putman, 2000, p. 121), SCC involvement with fundraising should not be constrained by policy. Fundraising is a collective activity that has great potential to generate and sustain the social infrastructure of the school, the scaffolding needed to enhance community involvement. For this reason, whether or not SCC members choose to fundraise should be determined by the SCC, not by policy.

As reinforced through my research, in order for SCCs to be successful, high levels of trust must be generated between its members and the community. At present, the SCC

policy mandates that SCC elections are to happen on an annual basis for half of its members (Endsin & Melvin, n.d.). It is difficult for an SCC to establish high levels of internal trust when half of its members may be new to the organization during any given year. With unstable membership, it is also unlikely that many SCCs can sustain high levels of trust over a prolonged period. Therefore, the SCC terms of office and election timelines need to be reconsidered by policymakers. The terms of office need to be more favorable toward generating thick trust within an SCC.

Practical Implementations

As highlighted through this research, community involvement is a product of effective communication, which activates stocks of social capital (Halpern, 2005). One of the first steps toward promoting effective communication between the SCC and the school community is the attainment of an SCC identity within the school community and, in turn, communicating to the community on behalf of this identity. It is vital that school district leaders, school administration, and SCC members devise quality communication at a variety of levels. For example, the creation and distribution of a school division newsletter dedicated to communicating SCC information and accomplishments is a novel idea. This information should be accessible to all school communities and their members within the school division. In an effort to acknowledge the SCC, information pertaining to SCCs could be delivered through site-based social networks including staff meetings, parent-teacher interviews, and face-to-face interaction at school events and community meetings. SCC information could be presented in written, pictorial, and/or electronic form, as exemplified by such things as community brochures, SCC member *business* cards, and SCC badges, buttons, and t-shirts. As well, the school webpage, school

newsletter, and signage in and around the school community need to relay SCC accomplishments and membership information. A picture of the SCC members could be included within the school. In general, greater effort must be directed toward marketing the existence and importance of local SCCs. In doing so, the personal, professional, and electronic resources in the school community should be recognized as potential medium of SCC communication. If an SCC is to be considered valuable within a school community, educational leaders and the SCC, itself, should actively communicate the success and significance of the association.

In order to prevent the SCC from being perceived by parents/community members to be or actually becoming an exclusive club (representing negative social capital), it is imperative that the school principal and SCC members actively promote SCC membership and attendance. As applied to my research, the SCC predominantly represented middle-aged, White females who were professionally employed outside the home. In addition to these parent and community members, SCC membership and attendance at meetings should include the presence of, for example, male parents and community members, citizens of lower economic status, citizens of varying religious affiliations, citizens who are new to the community, citizens below the age of 30, citizens above the age of 50, and Aboriginal peoples.

In order to gain ideal community representation, the school principal and SCC members may need to actively recruit and promote, through positive discrimination, certain community members for SCC positions. SCC members could establish a telephone tree, personally inviting community members to meetings. Furthermore, in order to address gender, cultural, socioeconomic, religious, and age representation, SCC

activities need to be attendee-friendly. For example, for meetings, transportation and onsite childcare should be provided for those people in need of such services. Actively seeking out the bridging social capital that is present within the community means SCC members would socially interact with and provide personal invitations for a variety of community members. To attempt to bridge the social milieus of the community through diverse SCC representation conjures a variety of professional, academic, cultural, and practical forms of community involvement in the school.

For the SCC to activate the latent social capital and personnel resources available within Sunshine's community, it is important that regular contact between SCC representatives and community members is encouraged. Such interaction could take the form of a survey, telephone calls, emails, focus group interviews, and/or face-to-face contact between community members and school personnel/SCC members. The input of teachers who are not SCC members is also important. Contact with these groups of people is a way for SCC members to gain awareness of the views within its community, make social contact with community members, and assess the social capital potential of the community.

SCC members also need to reflect on how to gain access to and communicate with community members who do not have children in the school as these individuals appear to be an untapped wealth of community resources for the school. Utilizing notions of generalized reciprocity may be one way to welcome and introduce such community members to the school. For example, the SCC, partnered with teachers and students, may wish to sponsor/organize a community senior citizens supper at the school. The SCC may wish to organize/sponsor students as snow angels to clear

driveways and sidewalks for senior citizens during the winter months. Perhaps the SCC could organize/sponsor community visits to the school particularly for those community members who don't have children in the school. In return, these community members may feel more welcome within the school environment and more socially comfortable with school agents. As Putnam (2000) believed, people who receive acts of kindness are more likely to help others. Thus, the hospitality the SCC extends to community members may be reciprocated toward the school.

Professional development for SCC members needs to happen on a continual basis. Presently, "Boards are responsible for providing ongoing orientation, training, development and networking for School Community Councils" (Endsin & Melvin, n.d., p. 7). For the most part, Sunshine's SCC members were satisfied with the professional development opportunities presented to them; however, as I perceived it, members did not integrate this outside knowledge into their meeting and activities. To capitalize on the applicability of SCC training, school boards need to ensure the training is pertinent to SCC needs, presented within a user-friendly and limited jargon format, and accessible for all SCC members. Such training could take the form of an SCC provincial website, online tutorials, outreach training conducted by SCC consultants, access to teacher conferences, and the provision of networking opportunities between SCCs.

Not only do SCC members need training, educators need to learn how to make use of the professional, practical, and tacit knowledge represented within their SCC. In order to do so, educators need to recognize the SCC as a resource capable of complementing the needs of school. This realization is something that can be reinforced through professional training for principals, teachers, and educational assistants. In this

manner, professional development is a catalyst activating bridging social capital between educators and parents, thereby promoting the advancement, growth, and innovation of the SCC and of parent-teacher relationships.

Significance of the Research

Previous researcher focusing on school councils has documented the opinions and beliefs of school council members, principals, teachers, and parents (Boylan, 2005; Boylan & Bittar, 2001; Collins, 2000). For the most part, this past research has largely ignored the perceptions of community members who do not have children enrolled in school. Within Saskatchewan, the overall age of citizens is rising, and one out of every seven Canadian citizens is over 65 years old (Greenaway, 2007). This demographic fact denotes that a larger portion of Canadian citizens do not have school-aged children. As exemplified within my study, rather than becoming disengaged from their school community when their children graduate from public schools, aging community members wanted to remain connected to the school. This study recognized that community members who do not have children attending the school are predominantly an untapped pool of knowledge and a fountain of volunteer strength for educational activities. Educators at local levels need to consider expending more energy on ensuring that community members who no longer have children attending the school are welcome and comfortable within the school culture.

In this study, it was apparent that there was a misalignment between how the SCC policy described the parental role in school improvement and how SCC members construed their own role. Mandating that parents/community members should play a direct role in the *Learning Improvement Plan* assumes that parents/community members

have the necessary background knowledge to make informed decisions. Regardless of the education levels of parents/community members, making well-informed educational decisions involves the understanding of pedagogy, curricula, and a host of educational jargon, all of which are often not readily understood by parents/community members. This kind of assumption depicts parents/community members as pseudo-teachers. The research documents the frustration that may arise as a result of such assumptions. This study indicated that many parents/community members did not want to assume formal educational responsibilities. On such a basis, expecting parents/community members to contribute to decisions without this professional background is perhaps inappropriate. Whereas educators and policymakers have a somewhat technical approach to school improvement planning, parents/community members generally have a broader interest targeted at the social wellbeing of their child. Educators, whether school-based or division-based, often approach school-related issues with emphasis placed on specific academic goals and targets. Parents/community members predominantly come to the SCC table to contribute to the general health and happiness of children and their community. This disconnect needs to be more fully acknowledged by policymakers and educators.

Through this research, I concluded that there exists an association between social relationships and community involvement in school. I highlighted that traditional forms of community involvement in school unites teachers, parents, and community members. Currently, many educational policies tend to focus on the importance of school-home relationships; however, as reflected through policy, policymakers largely neglect to recognize that the school's regular support and sponsorship of simple, traditional forms

of community involvement is a crucial and important part creating and nourishing school-home school relationships. In my research, I spotlight the vast, largely unrecognized potential of traditional forms of community involvement in school. This finding is a factor that future policymakers need to consider as they continue to seek ways to improve the educational experiences of students.

Bedroom communities are currently a topic of limited academic discourse. For this reason, my findings pertaining to bedroom communities are significant, especially as the population of bedroom communities is on the rise in Saskatchewan (Bernhardt, 2007; Saskatchewan Bureau of Statistics, 2009). Furthermore, this research may assist educators and community members who live and work in bedroom communities. Through this research, such readers are acquainted with possible characteristic of their own bedroom communities. With such knowledge, they are more empowered to support the positive and to deal with the challenging aspects of their own bedroom community.

The significance of this research is also captured within the fact that this study investigated the influence of an SCC. Because SCCs were legislated in 2006, there is limit research conducted on them. The only published SCC research which I know of is the pilot study conducted by my supervisor and me (Stelmach & Preston, 2008). Therefore, the timing of this study is crucial, because this research is an initial snapshot of a Saskatchewan SCC that was in a nascent stage of development.

Reflections on the Research

Having completed this study, I look back on the process and recognize the strength of the research. These qualities include my personal experience with SCCs and bedroom communities, the research methodology, the number of interviews conducted,

personal transcription of interviews, and the theoretical framework of the study. I believe my personal experience with SCCs and bedroom communities provided me with an ideal background needed to conduct this case study research. Not only was I knowledgeable about the topic at hand, this past experience enhanced my comfort and confidence as a researcher. On a methodological note, because it was my intention to capture the perceptions of individual participants, collecting information through individual interviews was an ideal form of data collection. In particular, the format of semi-structured individual interviews allowed me to probe for a deep, contextual meaning surrounding community involvement in school. The seven months spent conducting 35 interviews added to the quality of the research as prolonged engagement at a research site helps to overcome researcher biases and misconceptions. Data themes were created from a larger data pool, increasing the credibility of the study. Transcribing my own interviews was not only financially helpful, but it was a sound way to initially familiarize myself with the data. On a final note, most of my data findings related to the topic of relationship. Likewise, social capital theory attends to the topic of relationships. In such a way, my theoretical framework was aligned with the data findings, which, I believed strengthened the analytical aspects of my research.

Retrospectively, there were aspects of this study that, if I were to do the study again, I would do differently. Such issues focus on interview location, interviewing skills, and teacher participants. To begin, I recognize that the location of some interviews was not always ideal. For example, six of my 35 interviews were conducted in coffee shops. Due to background noise, when transcribing these interviews it was often difficult to hear what the interviewee said. Two of my interviews were conducted in a teacher's

classroom during her prep time. During these interviews, other teachers came into her classroom for a variety of reasons. I worried that this classroom location might affect the anonymity of the teacher participant. Although the classroom was the participant's choice, perhaps these interviews could have been conducted in a more private area of the school. Another area upon which I could improve is my personal interviewing techniques. In reviewing the interview transcripts, I recognize that I talk too much. I know the interview is not meant to focus on me; rather, the interview needs to capture the thoughts of my participant. Another negative aspect of me talking too much during interviews is the fact that it takes time to transcribe my words, and much of what I said during the interviews was irrelevant to the study. A final area upon which I would have liked to change was the number of teacher participants. For this study three teacher participants volunteered. Although I made considerable effort to increase the voice of the mainstream teachers, I did not ask educational assistants to participate in the study. If I were to do this study again, when planning my study and applying for ethics, I would have included an invitation to educational assistants to participate in my study.

A final aspect of my research reflections is a policy-related discussion. Having the dual experiences of an SCC member and SCC researcher, I comment on the formation of the SCC policy and its implementation process. I view the SCC policy as policymaker idealism. During its implementation stage, this idealism was confronted by the contextualized reality of local people. In an effort to explain these statements, I draw on an experience I had before conducting this study. I had the opportunity to communicate with some of the SCC policymakers. From my discussions with these people, I learned first-hand that the SCC policy was intended to promote local voice, a

point that was especially important after Saskatchewan school divisions were amalgamated into larger districts. These policymakers viewed the SCC policy as a vehicle for a generating a greater community presence within individual Saskatchewan schools. From this study, I learned that many SCC members, paradoxically, were frustrated because, due to the policy, they felt restricted from having an authentic voice in the school.

With regard to the implementation of the policy, I do not view the frustrations experienced by my participants as unique. Policy scholars acknowledge that local implementation of policy is often rife with difficulties (e.g., Spillane, Reiser, & Reimer, 2002; Tunison, 2001). As explained by Pressman and Wildavsky (1984), “Policies imply theories” (p. xxii). Theory becomes productive and useful when we ask reflective questions about how things work and how they could work differently across contexts. Herein, lies the importance of research, which spotlights how aspects of policy are played out. As stated by Rist (2003), “Qualitative work can provide ongoing monitoring of the situation—whether the condition has improved, worsened, remained static” (p. 631). The policy implications of this statement reinforce the importance of research such this one. Hopefully, my study is the beginning of more SCC research that will monitor and document experiences resulting from SCC policy. The insight gleaned from future research can help to accentuate the positive aspects of the SCC policy and inform policy improvement. The specifics of such future research are explicated below.

Suggestions for Future Research

Almost 20% of Canada’s population lives in rural communities, the other 80% resides in urban centers (Statistics Canada, 2008). This case study documented the lived

realities of an SCC located within a bedroom community that was proximal to a city. The parameters of this study could be extended to represent a multiple case study (Stake, 2005) involving a rural community (non-commuting distance to a city) and an urban community. Many research questions could inform such a study. For example, what role does a school council play in encouraging community involvement in a rural and urban community? What do rural and urban community members perceive to be ideal forms of community involvement in school? What school council challenges are associated with forging relationships within rural and urban schools? Because the social dynamics of rural and urban communities differ, a study that explicates the multiple realities of rural and urban relationships could help understand the contextualized role of school councils in rural and urban communities.

My present study reflected the experience of Saskatchewan participants. Historically, Saskatchewan was built from a rural heritage where its people, by tradition, valued community and the social networks that furnished the prosperity of that community. What would the results of this study be if conducted in another province or country without a strong pioneer heritage? More specifically, in Canada's Atlantic Provinces, what are community members' perspectives on community involvement in school? In the bedroom communities surrounding Ontario's large cities, what are community members' perspectives on community involvement in school? What importance do Canadian citizens of visible minorities place on community involvement in the school? When answering such questions, the traditional and cultural influence of participants outside of Saskatchewan would be explored.

In my study, I focused on the perceptions of a few senior citizens. One under-researched phenomenon focuses on senior citizens and their experiences with public schools. Greater research in how community members can embellish the school's culture should be undertaken. More specifically, the purpose of such a study would be to explore the role and influence of senior citizens on public schools. As part of this study, the perceptions of grandparents would be a particular area of interest. It would also be interesting to organize this research into a multiple case study, which would compare the lived experiences of senior citizens within rural, urban, and bedroom communities.

This study focused on how SCCs influence community involvement in school. What part, if any, does a SCC play in influencing the academic success of students? This study recognized that traditional forms of community involvement were a potential catalyst toward better home-school relations. Research specifically targeting how school councils specifically affect parent-teacher collaboration would be interesting. In relation to this question, what influence does a school council have on school and classroom practices?

This study reflected the reality of a public K to 12 school community. Do sectarian school communities stimulate novel ideas about community involvement in school? That is, how would the results of this study compare if it were conducted in a Catholic school community or independent school? What would be the results of a similar study conducted in an elementary school? What would be the results of a similar study conducted in a high school?

Summary of the Research

In this study, I explored the role a school council played in encouraging community participants in a K to 12 school located within a Saskatchewan bedroom community. I utilized social capital theory as a framework to assist me in analyzing the study's three research questions: (a) In what perceived ways does the School Community Council impact community involvement in a school community? (b) In what perceived ways does community involvement benefit and challenge school community? (c) How do social relationships impact the amount and type of community involvement that is reflected within the school community? By utilizing a constructivist research design, I studied "things in their natural setting, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 3). I recognized the views of participants as authentic representations of lived experiences. Over seven months, I conducted 35 semi-structured individual interviews, attended three SCC meetings, made 11 community/school visits, and maintained a journal to bracket my biases and to document personal thoughts. The triangulation of these data sources reinforced the credibility of the research.

The results of this research were that, for multiple reasons, Sunshine's SCC impact on community involvement in school was evolving. The SCC was new to the school community; Sunshine's SCC displayed nascent levels of thick trust between SCC members and with community members. Sunshine's SCC focused much of its attention on fulfilling the provincially-mandated requirement of contributing to the school's *Learning Improvement Plan*. Since supporting the school's centralized goals consumed the SCC's time and attention, it was less able to promote traditional forms of community

involvement in school as most of its members wanted it to. As well, teachers and community members had limited knowledge of the SCC's existence or purpose. Most participants identified lack of SCC communication as a factor that challenged the SCC members' ability to influence community involvement in school.

The vast majority of participants commented that traditional forms of community involvement in school were important to them. They identified traditional forms of community involvement to be parents/community members participating in school fundraisers, attending school events, driving students to sporting events, and having community guest speakers in classrooms. Participants perceived that these traditional activities socially united the school community. Many participants explained that traditional forms of community involvement nourished a variety of school-community relationships. Some participants described traditional forms of community involvement as nonthreatening to parents, and one participant believed traditional forms of community involvement positively influence student performance.

Within my study, traditional forms of community involvement in school were recognized as a way to nourish social capital. The forging of bonding, bridging, and linking relationships, through a variety of traditional means, was the fundamental component needed to create, complement, and sustain community involvement in school. This social currency was highly valuable in advancing home-school collaboration and communication throughout Sunshine's greater community.

Participants defined community as a socially active group of people who are dependent upon each other, promote communal wellbeing, and work together towards accomplishing a common goal. Closely aligned with participants' views, theoretical

scholars (e.g., Putnam, 2000; Woolcock, 1998) posit that the social and physical health of a community is dependent upon the social connectedness of its populace. Putnam and Woolcock indicated that nurturing social networks generate and activate stocks of social capital within a community, which stimulate enhanced communication, collaboration, and collective events. In such ways, tight social networks are linked to enhanced community involvement.

Within this study, I depicted the types of social relationships that existed within Sunshine's bedroom community and explored how these relationships influenced community involvement in that bedroom community. In general, the bedroom status of Sunshine negatively influenced community involvement, predominantly because regular social contact between community members did not appear to be highly prevalent among its citizens. Because the greater community of Sunshine was geographically dispersed, community members had limited contact with people living in pocket communities. That is, social capital was gradually being eroded due to the social fragmentation represented within Sunshine's pockets of communities. Furthermore, convenient access to urban amenities, the influx of new community members, and a generational shift of values and lifestyles were perceived by many participants to deter the formation and utilization of personal and professional stocks of social capital within Sunshine's bedroom community. Because of limited social contact, social relationships within this bedroom community were not nurtured and, thereby, rendered less personal. Ephemeral relationships among community members did not foster a trusting and caring attitude, which is a vital element needed for the enhancement and sustainability of community involvement (Putnam, 2000). In contrast, one area that supported social networking was the existence of

children and sports. Within the community of Sunshine, child-focused events and sporting activities appeared to unite community members and positively influence the active stocks of social capital present within the community.

Implications arising from this study pinpoint the importance of fostering trusting relationships not only between SCCs members but between SCCs and their communities. In order to generate higher levels of trust, and thereby strengthen the potency of social capital, Sunshine's SCC members need the freedom to self-create local goals. Another policy recommendation is that the SCC membership terms of office be reviewed to ensure that more time is allotted for SCC members to forge thick levels of trust within its association. On a practical level, Sunshine's SCC, administration, and school division need to focus on enhancing its SCC modes of communication with the school community. Furthermore, the SCC needs to promote traditional forms of community involvement (include the freedom to fundraise) to build upon the social infrastructure of the school community.

Epilogue

As John Donne wrote, "No man is an Iland [island], intire [entire] of it selfe [itself]" (as cited in Stubbs, 2007, p. 403). The message emanating from his writing is as applicable today as it was 400 years ago when it was first written. People are and hopefully always will be social beings, highly dependent upon the interaction, support, and influence of others. Having completed this study and reflecting on the big picture, I am convinced that nurturing strong, positive relationships helps to secure a healthy society and a bright future for all. In short, social relationships are the essence of life.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Ethics Approval

Jane Preston's Ethics Approval "The School Council and Community Participation: A Bedroom Community and its School"



**UNIVERSITY OF
SASKATCHEWAN**

Behavioural Research Ethics Board (Beh-REB)

Certificate of Approval

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR
Bonnie Stelmach

DEPARTMENT
Educational Administration

BEH#
08-122

INSTITUTION(S) WHERE RESEARCH WILL BE CONDUCTED
University of Saskatchewan
Saskatoon SK

STUDENT RESEARCHERS
Jane Preston

SPONSOR
UNFUNDED

TITLE
The School Council and Community Participation: A Bedroom Community and its School

ORIGINAL REVIEW DATE
16-May-2008

APPROVAL ON
18-Jun-2008

APPROVAL OF:
Ethics Application
Consent Protocol

EXPIRY DATE
17-Jun-2009

Full Board Meeting ☐

Date of Full Board Meeting:

Delegated Review ☒

CERTIFICATION

The University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Research Ethics Board has reviewed the above-named research project. The proposal was found to be acceptable on ethical grounds. The principal investigator has the responsibility for any other administrative or regulatory approvals that may pertain to this research project, and for ensuring that the authorized research is carried out according to the conditions outlined in the original protocol submitted for ethics review. This Certificate of Approval is valid for the above time period provided there is no change in experimental protocol or consent process or documents.

Any significant changes to your proposed method, or your consent and recruitment procedures should be reported to the Chair for Research Ethics Board consideration in advance of its implementation.

ONGOING REVIEW REQUIREMENTS

In order to receive annual renewal, a status report must be submitted to the REB Chair for Board consideration within one month of the current expiry date each year the study remains open, and upon study completion. Please refer to the following website for further instructions: http://www.usask.ca/research/ethics_review/

John Rigby, Chair
University of Saskatchewan
Behavioural Research Ethics Board

Please send all correspondence to

Ethics Office
University of Saskatchewan
Room 302 Kirk Hall, 117 Science Place
Saskatoon SK S7N 5C8
Telephone (306) 966-2975 Fax (306) 966-2069

Appendix B: Invitation Letter to Director of the School Division

May 2008

Dear *(Name of Director)* of *(Name of School Division)*,

My name is Jane Preston. I am a Ph.D. candidate in the College of Education at the University of Saskatchewan. It is through this letter that I invite the *(Name of School Division)* to be a part of my dissertation research, which will enable me to complete the requirements for a Doctor of Philosophy degree in Educational Administration.

The title of my research is *The School Council and Community Involvement: A Bedroom Community and Its School*. The purpose of this case study is **to explore the role a school council plays in encouraging community involvement in a K to 12 school located within a bedroom community**. The following research questions direct the study. In the context of a K to 12 school located within a bedroom community: (a) In what perceived ways does the School Community Council impact community involvement with the school and community? (b) In what perceived ways does community involvement benefit and challenge the school and community? (c) How do social relationships impact the amount and type of community involvement that is reflected within the school and community?

For the purpose of this study, a bedroom community is defined as any community that is located near a city and has a large portion of its population commuting to the city. Within *(Name of School Division)* there are *(list number)* schools that are located within my description of bedroom communities. These schools are *(list school names)*.

For this study, I will conduct one focus group interview with the school's School Community Council. Due to the public nature of focus group interviews, I cannot guarantee participant confidentiality for the focus group, but I will ask members within the focus group to respect participant confidentiality by not disclosing the contents of the discussion outside the focus group. I understand a School Community Council may include high school students, and student participation is welcomed within focus groups. In addition to focus group interviews, I will conduct two to three individual interviews with approximately four School Community Council members (who are not students), four teachers, and four community members. All interviews will last approximately one hour. Interview data will be augmented by observational field notes collected during attendance at two or three School Community Council meetings and through a personal reflective journal written during the data collection process.

Following your written consent, using the *(Name of School Division)*'s website, I will find the contact list for principals of the aforementioned schools. I will telephone the principals, explain the purpose of this study, and ask if his/her school council would be interested in participating in the study. If the principals convey a general interest in the study, I will provide a written description of the study, a copy of the focus group and individual semi-structured interview questions, and a consent form indicating the participant's rights (see Appendices). I would then ask the principal to forward and discuss these documents with his/her School Community Council. Based on interest, I will select one school as the focus of this study.

This study will not pose any foreseeable risk to participants. In compliance with the Behavioural Research Ethics Board (Beh-REB) at the University of Saskatchewan, the (*Name of School Division*) and selected participants have the right: (a) not to participate in the study, (b) to withdraw from the study at any time without being penalized in any form, (c) to withdraw from the study and thus have any collected data pertaining to him/her destroyed and not included in the study, and (d) of privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality. Participants will be assured of these rights in their invitation letter and through a signed consent/asset form. In keeping with the University of Saskatchewan guidelines, at the completion of the study, all documents, transcript, taped recordings, and notes will be secured at the University of Saskatchewan, in the office of my department supervisor, Dr. Bonnie Stelmach, for five years.

Enclosed are two copies of a written consent form for your consideration. If you decide to accept the invitation for the (*Name of the School Division*) to participate in this study, please sign and date both consent forms. Return one consent form to me in the self-addressed stamped envelope or through a fax or email. Please maintain one copy of the consent form for your records.

The protocol of this research has been reviewed, has been submitted to the Behavioural Research Ethics Board at the University of Saskatchewan, and has been approved on June 18, 2008. For questions pertaining to the participant's rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the University of Saskatchewan's Ethics Unit at (306) 966-2084.

I thank you for considering participation within this study. If you have any questions pertaining to any aspect of this research, feel free to contact my supervisor or myself through the following means:

Dr. Bonnie Stelmach
Educational Administration
College of Education, U of S
28 Campus Dr., Saskatoon, SK, S7N 0X1
(306) 966-7622 (office); (306) 966-7020 (fax)

Jane Preston
RR5, Site 512, Box 8
Saskatoon, SK, S7K 3J8
(306) 966-7628 (office)
(306) 652-6777 (home & fax)

bonnie.stelmach@usask.ca

jpp197@mail.usask.ca

Sincerely,

Jane Preston
Ph.D. Candidate Researcher
University of Saskatchewan

Appendix C: Telephone Script

(Inviting School and Community Members to the Participate in the Research)

Hello Mr./Mrs./Ms. (*Name of Person*),

My name is Jane Preston. I am a Ph.D. candidate in the College of Education at the University of Saskatchewan. I am doing Ph.D. research work with (*Name of School*) in (*Name of the Community*). How are you today?

The reason for this phone call is to invite your school/you to be a part of my research, which will enable me to complete the requirements for a Doctorate of Philosophy degree in Educational Administration. I got the name of your school/your name from (identify the person, place, website, etc.) Could I take about five minutes of your time to tell you a bit about the research I am doing?

The title of my research is *The School Council and Community Involvement: A Bedroom Community and Its School*. The purpose of this case study is **to explore the role a school council plays in encouraging community involvement in a K to 12 school located within a bedroom community**. As part of this study, I will conduct two to three interviews with approximately four community members from (*Name of Community*). All interviews will last approximately one hour. I am inviting you to be one of the people I interview.

The interviews questions I would ask participants deal with the School Community Council and how this association has influenced your community and your school. I am interested in hearing what they think about this issue. The questions I would ask have no right answer. Examples of interview questions are: “What does “*being part of a community*” mean to you?” “What is your understanding of the role of the School Community Council?” and “Explain any challenges that you think the School Community Council might face or have faced while trying to promote community involvement in the school?”

I am not asking you to make your decision right now as to whether or not your school/you would like to participate in this study. Through mail or email, I would like to send you more information of the study including: a formal description of this study, a copy of interview questions, and an explanation of ethical issue associated with the study. After receiving and reading through the information, please note, you are still not obliged to participate in this study. Could I send you this information pertaining to the study? Do you have any question for me at this time?

I thank you for your time. [If respondent agrees to have the research information sent to him/her...] Could I have your mail or email address? I will contact you again after you have had time to read over the information I will send.

Thank you (*Name of Person*) for talking with me today. I appreciate your time. [If respondent agrees to have the research information sent to him...] I will be in touch. Bye for now.

Appendix D: Invitation Letter

(For Principal, School Council Members, Teachers, and Community Members)

September, 2008

Dear (*Name of Principal and School Community Council*),

My name is Jane Preston. I am a Ph.D. candidate in the College of Education at the University of Saskatchewan. It is through this letter that I invite you to be a part of my dissertation research, which will enable me to complete the requirements for a Doctorate of Philosophy degree in Educational Administration. At present, I have received permission from (*Name of Director*) within the (*Name of School Division*) for you to participate in this study, if you wish.

The title of my research is *The School Council and Community Involvement: A Bedroom Community and Its School*. The purpose of this case study is **to explore the role a school council plays in encouraging community involvement in a K to 12 school located within a bedroom community**. The following research questions direct the study. In the context of a K to 12 school located within a bedroom community: (a) In what perceived ways does the School Community Council impact community involvement with the school and community? (b) In what perceived ways does community involvement benefit and challenge the school and community? (c) How do social relationships impact the amount and type of community involvement that is reflected within the school and community?

For the purpose of this study, a bedroom community is defined as any community that is located near a city and has a large portion of its population commuting to the city. There are two schools within the (*Name of School Division*), which fit my description of bedroom communities. These schools are (*list schools' names*).

For this study, I will conduct one focus group interview with the school's School Community Council. Due to the public nature of focus group interviews, I cannot guarantee participant confidentiality for the focus group, but I will ask members within the focus group to respect participant confidentiality by not disclosing the contents of the discussion outside the focus group. I understand a School Community Council may include high school students, and student involvement is welcomed within focus groups. In addition to focus group interviews, I will conduct two to three individual interviews with approximately four School Community Council members (who are not students), four teachers, and four community members. All interviews will last approximately one hour. Interview data will be augmented by observational field notes collected during attendance at two or three School Community Council meetings and through a personal reflective journal written during the data collection process.

Included are a copy of focus group interview questions, a copy of semi-structured interview questions for the School Community Council, teachers, and community members, and a copy of the consent/assent form indicating the participants' rights and the ethical standards pertaining to this study.

Informed and written consent/assent will be obtained from all participants before interviews. All participants will receive a typed copy of the focus group transcript and then be asked to make additions, deletions, or any changes they see appropriate before returning their signed Data/Transcript Release Form (see attached form) to me.

This study will not pose any foreseeable risk to participants. In compliance with the Behavioural Research Ethics Board (Beh-REB) at the University of Saskatchewan, all participants have the right: (a) not to participate in the study; (b) to withdraw from the study at any time without being penalized in any form; (c) to withdraw from the study and thus have any collected data pertaining to him/her destroyed and not included in the study; and (d) of privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality. Participants will be reminded of their rights before the start of interviews. In keeping with the University of Saskatchewan guidelines, at the completion of the study, documents relating to this research will be secured at the University of Saskatchewan, in the office of my department supervisor, Dr. Bonnie Stelmach, for five years.

Enclosed are copies of a written consent/assent form for the consideration of you and your Council members. If you and your Council members decide to accept the invitation to participate in this study, each one of you will need to sign and date consent forms. Students under the age of 18 who will participate within the focus groups interviews will need to sign the assent form as well as have their parent sign the consent form. Return one copy of the signed and dated consent/assent form to me in the self-addressed stamped envelope or through fax or email. Please keep one copy of the consent/assent form for individual records.

The protocol of this research has been reviewed and approved by the Behavioural Research Ethics Board at the University of Saskatchewan on (*insert date*). For questions pertaining to the participant rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the University of Saskatchewan's Ethics Unit at (306) 966-2084.

I thank you for considering participation within this study. If you have any questions in any area, feel free to contact my supervisor or myself through the following means:

Dr. Bonnie Stelmach
Educational Administration
College of Education, U of S
28 Campus Drive
Saskatoon, SK, S7N 0X1
(306) 966-7622 (office)
(306) 966-7020(fax)
bonnie.stelmach@usask.ca

Jane Preston
RR5, Site 512, Box 8
Saskatoon, SK
S7K 3J8
(306) 966-7628 (office)
(306) 652-6777 (home & fax)
jpp197@mail.usask.ca

Sincerely,

Jane Preston
Ph.D. Candidate Researcher

Appendix E: Individual Interview Questions (SCC Members)

You and Your Community

1. To start with, tell me a bit about yourself and your community.
2. What are your interests and hobbies? Do you belong to any social groups or organizations other than the School Community Council? If so, please describe them.

Meaning of “Community”

3. How would you define community? What do you think makes a community strong?
4. What does community involvement in school mean to you? Describe a school where community involvement is not an issue.

The Role of the School Community Council

5. What is your understanding of the role of the School Community Council?
6. If you came across a scenario where community involvement in a school was lacking, how could the School Community Council help alleviate the problem and increase community support for the school?
7. Comment on the effectiveness of any School Community Council training you might have had. If you haven't had any training, would you like training and, if so, what might this training look like?

Benefits of Community Involvement

8. What type of community involvement do you perceive to be most beneficial to the school?

Challenges of Community Involvement

9. Does your School Community Council face challenges while trying to promote community involvement in your school? Why or why not?

Personal Friends and Contacts

10. Do you think the personal friends and contacts of School Community Council affect the amount and type of community involvement that is reflected within the school? If so, in what way?

Wrap-up Questions

11. In general, how has the school changed (if any) due to the presence of the School Community Council?
12. If you were to offer a piece of advice to your School Community Council, what would it be and why?

Appendix F: Individual Interview Questions (Teachers & Community Members)

You, Your Community, and the School

1. To start with, tell me a bit about yourself (your job, your interests, etc.).
2. Describe this community and the school.

Meaning of “Community”

3. In your opinion, what does “*being part of a community*” mean?
4. What makes a community strong?
5. When community involvement is happening well within a school, what do you think it looks like?
6. Describe the type of relationship the school and community currently has with each other. Provide some examples that illustrate how the school and community interact.

The Role of the School Community Council

7. For the past (*the number*) months, (*name of the school*) has been represented by a School Community Council. This council is made up of parent and community members. What’s your understanding of the role the School Community Council plays within the school?
8. One of the purposes of the School Community Council is to encourage and promote community involvement in the school.
 - a. If a teacher → In what ways (if any) do you think the presence of the School Community Council has affected your classroom and/or how you teach?
 - b. If a community member → In what ways (if any) do you think the presence of the School Community Council has affected your school and community?

Benefits of Community Involvement

9. What type of community involvement do you perceive to be beneficial to the school?
10. In your opinion, has the School Community Council effectively promoted this type of community involvement in the school? Why or why not?

Challenges of Community Involvement

11. Explain any challenges that you think the School Community Council might face or have faced while trying to promote community involvement in the school?

Personal Friends and Contacts

12. School Community Council members have family, friends, and various personal and professional connections. Do you think the contacts that School Community Council members have affect the amount and type of community involvement in the school? If so, in what way?

Wrap-up Questions

13. In general, how has the school changed (if any) due to the presence of the School Community Council?
14. If you were to offer a piece of advice to your School Community Council, what would it be and why?

Appendix G: Consent Form

Dear Participant,

You are invited to participate in a study entitled, *The School Council and Community Involvement: A Bedroom Community and its School*. Please read this form carefully and feel free to ask any questions you might have.

Researcher

Jane Preston, Department of Educational Administration, College of Education, University of Saskatchewan, (306) 652-6777 (home), (306) 966-7628 (office), jpp197@mail.usask.ca.

Purpose and Procedure

The purpose of this case study is **to explore the role a school council plays in encouraging community involvement in a K to 12 school located within a bedroom community**. The following research questions direct the study. In the context of a K to 12 school located within a bedroom community: (a) In what perceived ways does the School Community Council impact community involvement with the school and community? (b) In what perceived ways does community involvement benefit and challenge the school and community? (c) How do social relationships impact the amount and type of community involvement that is reflected within the school and community?

Within a bedroom community, one K to 12 will be selected for this research. A bedroom community is defined within this study as any community that is located near a city and has a large portion of its population commuting to the city. For this research, I will conduct one focus group interview with the school's School Community Council. I will also conduct two to three semi-structured individual interviews with approximately four School Community Council members, four teachers, and four community members. All interviews will last approximately one hour. Interview data will be augmented by observational field notes collected during attendance at two or three School Community Council meetings and through the maintenance of a personal reflective journal during the data collection process.

Semi-structured focus group and/or individual interview questions are attached for your review. After receiving written consent, I will contact you and arrange a convenient time and location for interviews. With your permission, I will tape the interview and later transcribe the interview.

Potential Risks

The study poses minimal risk to participants. Participants may answer only those questions with which they are comfortable. As a participant, you are free to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence. If you wish to withdraw from the study, any data that you had provided would be destroyed. Measures will be taken to ensure the confidentiality, privacy, and anonymity of participants. Specifically because of the public nature of focus group interviews, I cannot guarantee that all members within the focus group will maintain the confidentiality, privacy, and anonymity of individuals. However, at the beginning of the focus group, participants will be asked to respect the comments and contributions of all participants. I will ask all participants to refrain from repeating any information discussed during the focus group.

Storage of Data

Throughout the study period, all researcher documents will be kept in a safe a secure place. At the completion of this study and in accordance with the University of Saskatchewan guidelines, research materials including transcripts/notes, taped recordings, field notes, and my reflective journal will be safeguarded for a period of five years at the University of Saskatchewan under the care of my supervisor, Dr. Bonnie Stelmach. After five years, all research materials pertaining to this study will be destroyed.

Confidentiality

The data from this study may be published and presented at professional conferences and within academic journals; however, your identity will be kept confidential. Although the researcher will use direct quotations from interviews, each participant will be given a pseudonym. All identifying information about the participant, school, community location, or school division will be removed. In reporting the data, no verbatim comments will be used that may risk confidentiality, privacy, and anonymity. Participants are welcome to choose their pseudonym.

The researcher will undertake to safeguard the confidentiality of the discussion of the focus group; however, given the public nature of focus groups, the researcher cannot guarantee that other members of the group will do so. Please respect the confidentiality of the other members of the group by not disclosing the contents of this discussion outside the group, and be aware that other may not respect your confidentiality.

Right to Withdrawal

Participation within this study is voluntary. A participant may withdraw from the study for any reason, at any time, without any penalty of a sort. If a participant withdraws from the study, all data he/she has contributed will be destroyed upon request.

Questions

If you have any questions concerning the study, ask me at any time. This study has been approved on ethical grounds by the University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Research Ethics Board on June 18, 2008. Any questions regarding your rights as a participant may also be addressed to the Ethics Committee through the Ethics Office (966–2084). Out-of-town participants may call collect. Also note, at the completion of the study, you may request a summary of findings.

Consent to Participate

I have read and understood the description above. I have been provided with an opportunity to ask questions, and my questions have been answered satisfactorily. I consent to participate in this study, understanding that I may withdraw this consent at any time. A copy of this consent form has been given to me for my records.

(Name of Participant)

(Date)

(Signature of Participant)

(Signature of Researcher)

Appendix H: Data/Transcript Release Form

In relation to the research study entitled, *The School Council and Community Involvement: A Bedroom Community and Its School*, I, _____, have reviewed the complete transcripts of the interview(s) with Jane Preston. I have been provided with the opportunity to add, alter, and delete information from the transcript(s) as appropriate. I acknowledge that the summary accurately reflects what I said in the focus group discussion or individual interview with Jane Preston. I hereby authorize the release of this data to Jane Preston to be used in the manner described in the consent form. I have received a copy of this Data/Transcript Release Form for my own records.

(Name of Participant)

(Date)

(Signature of Participant)

(Signature of Researcher)

Appendix I: External Auditor's Report

Letter of Attestation

This letter of attestation is in relation to the inquiry audit of the Ph.D. dissertation written by Jane Preston entitled "The School Council and Community Participation: A Bedroom Community and its School."

The purpose of this study is to "explore the role a school council plays in encouraging community participation in a K to 12 school located within a bedroom community, as perceived by School Community Council members, teachers, and community members."

This qualitative case study included data collected from 35 semi-structured individual interviews conducted with Sunshine's Community Council (SCC) members, teachers, and community members. Augmented data collection incorporated my attendance at three SCC meetings, 11 community and school visits, and the maintenance of a personal journal during the interview process. Data results were analyzed through Putman's concept of social theory.

The Audit Procedure –Verification and Accuracy of Transcripts and Disk Recordings.

1. Consent and Data/Transcript release forms

All of the 'Consent forms' and 'Data/Transcript Release Forms' for the 17 participants in this research study are reviewed for signatures and completion. The forms:

- a) list the participants of the study provided for the audit and
- b) are signed by the participants and the researcher.

2. Selection of Samples for Verification and Accuracy of Disk Recordings to Transcripts:

a) Procedure and Observations for disk to transcripts tests:

There are 32 interview tapes provided. Five tapes are randomly chosen. The first page of each and then 3 times during fast-forwarding, the tapes were paused to compare audio statements to the transcripts to note any discrepancies.

b) Accuracy of Quotations in Relation to Data Sources

All comparisons between recordings and transcripts were positive. The words spoken on disk were the words that appeared in transcripts.

3. Accuracy of Dissertation Chapter Four References to Transcripts:

a) Procedure and Observations for Chapter 4 references.

I observed 249 quoted references in chapter 4 to the working papers. I chose a random sample of 10 of those references and compared them to the supporting working documents.

b) Accuracy of References in Dissertation to Disk Recording Transcripts.

All references investigated in Chapter Four were found and verified as accurate.

4. Inspection of Ethics Proposal and Certificate.

I have reviewed the candidate's application for approval of Research Protocol and the ethics statement provided. The procedures used by researcher and the protocols followed in the research are consistent with this approval. An analysis of the data reduction and interpretation of data was not considered by this audit. It remains for the researcher to turn the materials above, over to the University for secure storage for a five-year period.

5. Summary

Despite minor omissions the transcripts and data files are accurate transcriptions of the recorded interviews. The transcription of quotations in the dissertation represent a faithful record of the stick-held interview transcripts.

As a result of the audit, I as auditor, testify that the transcripts/data sheets which I have examined in relation to the Jane Preston dissertation are true and accurate.

Eric Campbell

Eric Campbell, B. Comm., M.B.A. (Queens) (retired member Institute of Internal Auditors and Association of College and University Auditors)

2010-06-16

Appendix J: Sunshine School Community Council Minutes of Meeting⁶

Tuesday, November 4, 2008

1. Welcome 7:00 p.m.

Present: Name of 7 SCC members

Absent: Names of 3 SCC members

Guests: Name of 4 guests

Send a copy on behalf of the SCC to school division's superintendent.

2. Minutes of last meeting

Minutes approved as corrected regarding attendees/absent list and vice-principal being invited to an appointed member as reported during the Principal's Report.

3. Secretary / Treasurer Report

- a) Bank Reconciliation reports were unavailable to be presented.

Secretary/treasurer reported on treasurer's account debiting \$80.53 for receipts provided for the Meet the Teacher costs and a debit in the amount of \$8.06 for file folders. Showing a balance remaining at \$3,179.52.

- b) Chair presented correspondence from the Director of the school division regarding the SCC Annual Report.

5. Reports (Student representative requested to present early to be excused for remainder of the meeting.)

b) Student Representative Report

- Magazine Sales were down from previous year.
- The Halloween dance made a profit.
- Upcoming Remembrance Day Ceremony is on Friday, November 7th.
- A new club called, "Project Green" is being created by the SRC in cooperation with school administration. This club is environmentally friendly and has already applied for a SaskEnergy grant. Project Green has initiated education in the school about plants and the carbon cycle. SCC member #1 suggests the idea of Red Wiggler worms. SCC member #2 is interested in more information. Project Green is asking for the support of the School Community Council.
- School clothing sales closed October 31st.
- Upcoming Sunshine School Senior Football team plays for Provincials.

4. Business Arising from Minutes

⁶ For reasons of anonymity, throughout this document, the specific names of people and places have been changed to generic names.

a) ***Learning Improvement Plan***, please see school copy as provided by Chair.

- i. *Constructivism Math* – Continue offering workshop evenings with school division representative for parents and students from K–8. SCC member will oversee the group divisions for presentation. The sub-committee will decide/organize an evening for February or March '09 to be approved by council.
- ii. *Reading Comprehension* – for middle years and high school – how to get these age groups involved? Focus on comprehension of what you've read in school or home. Learning Support Facilitators from division level (name of two school division representatives) would be good resources for guiding parents on what to ask their children. Vice-principal suggests researching the 7 Reading Comprehension Strategies. How to get information “out there” rather than parents to the school? A great discussion ensued regarding the creation of an on-line video with a script for LSF (name of person). Include student engagement through school projects for videoing and editing. SCC member suggests contacting (name of person) for a Read to Success program. Council agreed via discussion to focus on a broad statement, then develop specific goals and future deadlines to submit for our LIP. An action plan will be assigned by the sub-committee which shall map out the process rather than a finite time. Action Plan to be completed by Mary '09.
- iii. *Student Engagement* (includes parent voice)
 - a) Completed the SCC Logo Contest
 - b) Tabled ideas
 - Student/parent competition – traditional games fun night
 - Ballroom dance classes/evenings
 - New families (Welcome Wagon idea) assigned to an SCC member for direct contact.
 - Wii contest; require parent attendance to compete, possible SRC leading the Wii in the gym while parents attend a Math Session
 - Include possible ideas/feedback from the TTFM; Name of two SCC members to follow-up with name of another SCC member regarding the open ended question
 - Respond to TTFM survey with a specific action prior to June '09

After discussion on the above ideas, this item has been tabled to December follow-up

b) **Honorarium for speakers** (name of a past presenter) Chair tabled that name of past presenter be given a letter on SCC letterhead for her personal portfolio as well as a gift certificate from either Indigo or McNally Robinson in the amount of \$30. Discussion ensued about the appropriateness of gifts and the general consensus of the council for

future considerations would be on an individual presenter basis, however, no cast payment will be permitted.

Motion to provide honorarium: Name of SCC member

Seconded: Name of SCC member, vote passed

c) **Corrections on member contact list** – circulated and updated

d) **Sub-committee Chair Planning** – see bottom of page 46-47

5. Reports

a) **Principal's Report** – Name of principal was unable to attend tonight's meeting. Vice-principal offered to answer any question that council wished to ask in he stead. Council thanks vice-principal and moved to next item.

b) **Student Representative Report** – see above

c) **Council Member Report** – N/A

d) **Sub-Committee Reports**

- i. *Logo Committee* – SCC member reported on behalf of the sub-committee
 - A huge thank you to be passed along to name of teacher for her involvement in getting the students participation as well as assisting in organizing the viewing of the entrants for the sub-committee
 - Deadline for submission were met as of Oct 30, 2008
 - See attached report for outline/deadlines/committee dissolve date
- ii. *Teacher Appreciation Committee* – SCC member reported on behalf of the sub-committee
 - Interested in following up with letter previously approved in Sept meeting
 - Require more information for division regarding the collection of monies, a possibility of fund being earmarked in the school division's account
 - Idea for donated gifts to be presented at Christmas final assembly or an SCC member dressing as Santa and presenting to the teachers in their classrooms
 - Idea for involvement at the year-end lunch as name of teacher's residence
 - Council agrees that this is a very worth sub-committee, however, a more formal action plan will be required to be submitted before council can approve action at this time. Council would prefer to focus towards Teacher Appreciation Week in February of the year End function as Christmas deadlines are quickly approaching.

6. New Business

- a) **Jane Preston** – request for help with study, a Ph.D. student at the University of Saskatchewan (College of Education). Jane addressed council and congratulated its members on their commitment, enthusiasm and values supporting the school administration and the course of the students. After a brief personal introduction using her pre-placed presentation folders for each member and guest she introduced the idea of her study of how this is the final stage to complete her study. Jane answered questions and assured whomever chose to participate would have anonymity in her study as well as a typed transcript of the interview. Jane was very conscientious and would be following up with individual members.
- b) **WEE Program Facilitation** – Vice principal asked for the return of any surveys that may have been collected so that they could be forwarded on to name of teacher. If not already done, could they be summarized with the originals provided as back-up, to represent the SCC general comments.
- c) **In Motion Initiative** – a file folder will be placed in the SCC cabinet containing information fathered to-date to be accessed in the future. Other sources of information may be obtained from name of people.
- d) **Citizenship Award** – table to next meeting
- e) **Partnerships with name of school and other SCCs** – tabled to next meeting
- f) **Record Storage** – table to next meeting.

7. Next Meeting – 7:00 p.m. Tuesday, December 4, 2008